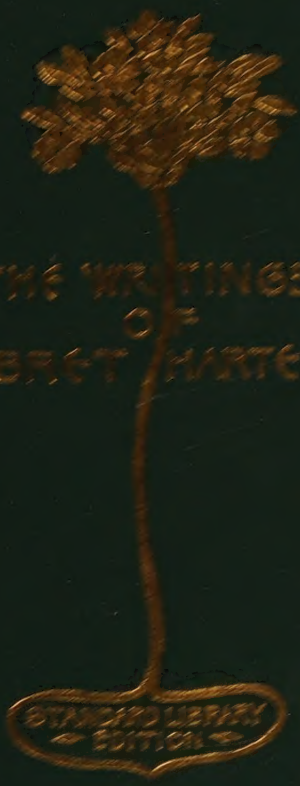
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THE WRITINGS OF

BRET HARTE

WITH INTRODUCTIONS, GLOSSARY, AND INDEXES

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VOLUME VIII

The Writings of Bret Harte

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Stories of California and the Frontier

A FIRST FAMILY OF TASAJARA

AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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A FIRST FAMILY OF TASAJARA AND OTHER TALES

A FIRST FAMILY OF TASAJARA

CHAPTER I

"It blows," said Joe Wingate.

As if to accent the words of the speaker a heavy gust of wind at that moment shook the long light wooden structure which served as the general store of Sidon settlement, in Contra Costa. Even after it had passed a prolonged whistle came through the keyhole, sides, and openings of the closed glass front doors, that served equally for windows, and filled the canvas ceiling which hid the roof above like a bellying sail. A wave of enthusiastic emotion seemed to be communicated to a line of straw hats and sou'-westers suspended from a cross-beam, and swung them with every appearance of festive rejoicing; while a few dusters, overcoats, and "hickory" shirts hanging on the side walls exhibited such marked though idiotic animation that it had the effect of a satirical comment on the lazy, purposeless figures of the four living inmates of the store.

Ned Billings momentarily raised his head and shoulders depressed in the back of his wooden armchair, glanced wearily around, said, "You bet, it 's no slouch of a storm," and then lapsed again with further extended legs and an added sense of comfort.

Here the third figure, which had been leaning listlessly

against the shelves, putting aside the arm of a swaying overcoat that seemed to be emptily embracing him, walked slowly from behind the counter to the door, examined its fastenings, and gazed at the prospect. He was the owner of the store, and the view was a familiar one, — a long stretch of treeless waste before him meeting an equal stretch of dreary sky above, and night hovering somewhere between the two. This was indicated by splashes of darker shadow as if washed in with india ink, and a lighter low-lying streak that might have been the horizon, but was not. To the right, on a line with the front door of the store, were several scattered, widely dispersed objects, that, although vague in outline, were rigid enough in angles to suggest sheds or barns, but certainly not trees.

"There 's a heap more wet to come afore the wind goes down," he said, glancing at the sky. "Hark to that, now!"

They listened lazily. There was a faint murmur from the shingles above; then suddenly the whole window was filmed and blurred as if the entire prospect had been wiped out with a damp sponge. The man turned listlessly away.

"That 's the kind that soaks in; thar won't be much teamin' over Tasajara for the next two weeks, I reckon," said the fourth lounger, who, seated on a high barrel, was nibbling — albeit critically and fastidiously — biscuits and dried apples alternately from open boxes on the counter. "It 's lucky you 've got in your winter stock, Harkutt."

The shrewd eyes of Mr. Harkutt, proprietor, glanced at the occupation of the speaker as if even his foresight might have its possible drawbacks, but he said nothing.

"There 'll be no show for Sidon until you 've got a wagon road from here to the creek," said Billings languidly, from the depths of his chair. "But what 's the use o' talkin'? Thar ain't energy enough in all Tasajara to build it. A God-forsaken place, that two months of the year

can only be reached by a mail-rider once a week, don't look ez if it was goin' to break its back haulin' in goods and settlers. I tell ye what, gentlemen, it makes me sick!" And apparently it had enfeebled him to the extent of interfering with his aim in that expectoration of disgust against the stove with which he concluded his sentence.

"Why don't *you* build it?" asked Wingate carelessly.

"I would n't on principle," said Billings. "It 's gov-'ment work. What did we whoop up things here last spring to elect Kennedy to the legislation for? What did I rig up my shed and a thousand feet of lumber for benches at the barbecue for? Why, to get Kennedy elected and make him get a bill passed for the road! That 's *my* share of building it, if it comes to that. And I only wish some folks, that blow enough about what oughter be done to bulge out that ceiling, would only do as much as *I* have done for Sidon."

As this remark seemed to have a personal as well as local application, the storekeeper diplomatically turned it. "There 's a good many as *don't* believe that a road from here to the creek is going to do any good to Sidon. It 's very well to say the creek is an embarcadero, but callin' it so don't put enough water into it to float a steamboat from the bay, nor clear out the reeds and tules in it. Even if the State builds you roads, it ain't got no call to make Tasajara Creek navigable for ye; and as that will cost as much as the road, I don't see where the money 's comin' from for both."

"There 's water enough in front of 'Lige Curtis's shanty, and his location is only a mile along the bank," returned Billings.

"Water enough for him to laze away his time fishin' when he 's sober, and deep enough to drown him when he 's drunk," said Wingate. "If you call that an embarcadero, you kin buy it any day from 'Lige — title, possession, and shanty thrown in — for a demijohn o' whiskey."

The fourth man here distastefully threw back a half nibbled biscuit into the box, and languidly slipped from the barrel to the floor, fastidiously flicking the crumbs from his clothes as he did so. "I reckon somebody 'll get it for nothing, if 'Lige don't pull up mighty soon. He 'll either go off his head with jim-jams or jump into the creek. He 's about as near desp'rit as they make 'em; and havin' no partner to look after him, and him alone in the tules, ther' 's no tellin' *what* he may do."

Billings, stretched at full length in his chair, here gurgled derisively. "Desp'rit! — ketch him! Why, that 's his little game! He 's jist playin' off his desp'rit condition to frighten Sidon. Whenever any one asks him why he don't go to work, whenever he 's hard up for a drink, whenever he 's had too much or too little, he 's workin' that desp'rit dodge, and even talkin' o' killin' himself! Why, look here," he continued, momentarily raising himself to a sitting posture in his disgust, "it was only last week he was over at Rawlett's trying to raise provisions and whiskey outer his water rights on the creek! Fact, sir, — had it all written down lawyer-like on paper. Rawlett did n't exactly see it in that light, and told him so. Then he up with the desp'rit dodge and began to work that. Said if he had to starve in a swamp like a dog he might as well kill himself at once, and would, too, if he could afford the weppins. Johnson said it was not a bad idea, and offered to lend him his revolver; Bilson handed up his shotgun, and left it alongside of him, and turned his head away considerate-like and thoughtful, while Rawlett handed him a box of rat pizon over the counter, in case he preferred suthin' more quiet. Well, what did 'Lige do? Nothin'! Smiled kinder sickly, looked sorter wild, and shut up. He did n't suicide much. No, sir! He did n't kill himself, — not he. Why, old Bixby — and he 's a deacon in good standin' — allowed, in 'Lige's hearin' and for 'Lige's bene-

fit, that self-destruction was better nor bad example, and proved it by Scripture, too. And yet 'Lige did nothin'! Desp'rit! He 's only desp'rit to laze around and fish all day off a log in the tules, and soak up with whiskey, until, betwixt fever an' ague and the jumps, he kinder shakes hisself free o' responsibility."

A long silence followed; it was somehow felt that the subject was incongruously exciting; Billings allowed himself to lapse again behind the back of his chair. Meantime it had grown so dark that the dull glow of the stove was beginning to outline a faint halo on the ceiling even while it plunged the further lines of shelves behind the counter into greater obscurity.

"Time to light up, Harkutt, ain't it?" said Wingate tentatively.

"Well, I was reckoning ez it 's such a wild night there would n't be any use keepin' open, and when you fellows left I 'd just shut up for good and make things fast," said Harkutt dubiously. Before his guests had time to fully weigh this delicate hint, another gust of wind shook the tenement, and even forced the unbolted upper part of the door to yield far enough to admit an eager current of humid air that seemed to justify the wisdom of Harkutt's suggestion. Billings slowly and with a sigh assumed a sitting posture in the chair. The biscuit-nibbler selected a fresh dainty from the counter, and Wingate abstractedly walked to the window and rubbed the glass. Sky and water had already disappeared behind a curtain of darkness that was illuminated by a single point of light — the lamp in the window of some invisible but nearer house — which threw its rays across the glistening shallows in the road. "Well," said Wingate, buttoning up his coat in slow dejection, "I reckon I oughter be travelin' to help the old woman do the chores before supper." He had just recognized the light in his own dining-room, and knew by that

sign that his long-waiting helpmeet had finally done the chores herself.

"Some folks have it mighty easy," said Billings, with long-drawn discontent, as he struggled to his feet. "You 've only a step to go, and yer 's me and Peters there" — indicating the biscuit-nibbler, who was beginning to show alarming signs of returning to the barrel again — "hev got to traipse five times that distance."

"More 'n half a mile, if it comes to that," said Peters gloomily. He paused in putting on his overcoat as if thinking better of it, while even the more fortunate and contiguous Wingate languidly lapsed against the counter again.

The moment was a critical one. Billings was evidently also regretfully eying the chair he had just quitted. Harkutt resolved on a heroic effort.

"Come, boys," he said, with brisk conviviality, "take a parting drink with me before you go." Producing a black bottle from some obscurity beneath the counter that smelt strongly of india-rubber boots, he placed it with four glasses before his guests. Each made a feint of holding his glass against the opaque window while filling it, although nothing could be seen. A sudden tumult of wind and rain again shook the building, but even after it had passed the glass door still rattled violently.

"Just see what 's loose, Peters," said Billings; "you 're nearest it."

Peters, still holding the undrained glass in his hand, walked slowly towards it.

"It 's suthin' — or somebody outside," he said hesitatingly.

The three others came eagerly to his side. Through the glass, clouded from within by their breath and filmed from without by the rain, some vague object was moving, and what seemed to be a mop of tangled hair was apparently

brushing against the pane. The door shook again, but less strongly. Billings pressed his face against the glass. "Hol' on," he said in a quick whisper, — "it's 'Lige!" But it was too late. Harkutt had already drawn the lower bolt, and a man stumbled from the outer obscurity into the darker room.

The inmates drew away as he leaned back for a moment against the door that closed behind him. Then dimly, but instinctively, discerning the glass of liquor which Wingate still mechanically held in his hand, he reached forward eagerly, took it from Wingate's surprised and unresisting fingers, and drained it at a gulp. The four men laughed vaguely, but not as cheerfully as they might.

"I was just shutting up," began Harkutt dubiously.

"I won't keep you a minit," said the intruder, nervously fumbling in the breast pocket of his hickory shirt. "It's a matter of business — Harkutt — I" — But he was obliged to stop here to wipe his face and forehead with the ends of a loose handkerchief tied round his throat. From the action, and what could be seen of his pale, exhausted face, it was evident that the moisture upon it was beads of perspiration, and not the rain which some abnormal heat of his body was converting into vapor from his sodden garments as he stood there.

"I've got a document here," he began again, producing a roll of paper tremblingly from his pocket, "that I'd like you to glance over, and perhaps you'd" — His voice, which had been feverishly exalted, here broke and rattled with a cough.

Billings, Wingate, and Peters fell apart and looked out of the window. "It's too dark to read anything now, 'Lige," said Harkutt, with evasive good humor, "and I ain't lightin' up to-night."

"But I can tell you the substance of it," said the man, with a faintness that however had all the distinctness of

a whisper, "if you 'll just step aside a minute. It 's a matter of importance and a bargain" —

"I reckon we must be goin'," said Billings to the others, with marked emphasis. "We 're keepin' Harkutt from shuttin' up." "Good-night!" "Good-night!" added Peters and Wingate, ostentatiously following Billings hurriedly through the door. "So long!"

The door closed behind them, leaving Harkutt alone with his importunate intruder. Possibly his resentment at his customers' selfish abandonment of him at this moment developed a vague spirit of opposition to them and mitigated his feeling towards 'Lige. He groped his way to the counter, struck a match, and lit a candle. Its feeble rays faintly illuminated the pale, drawn face of the applicant, set in a tangle of wet, unkempt, party-colored hair. It was not the face of an ordinary drunkard; although tremulous and sensitive from some artificial excitement, there was no engorgement or congestion in the features or complexion, albeit they were morbid and unhealthy. The expression was of a suffering that was as much mental as physical, and yet in some vague way appeared unmeaning — and unheroic.

"I want to see you about selling my place on the creek. I want you to take it off my hands for a bargain. I want to get quit of it, at once, for just enough to take me out o' this. I don't want any profit; only money enough to get away." His utterance, which had a certain kind of cultivation, here grew thick and harsh again, and he looked eagerly at the bottle which stood on the counter.

"Look here, 'Lige," said Harkutt, not unkindly. "It 's too late to do anythin' to-night. You come in to-morrow." He would have added "when you 're sober," but for a trader's sense of politeness to a possible customer, and probably some doubt of the man's actual condition.

"God knows where or what I may be to-morrow! It

would kill me to go back and spend another night as the last, if I don't kill myself on the way to do it."

Harkutt's face darkened grimly. It was indeed as Billings had said. The pitiable weakness of the man's manner not only made his desperation inadequate and ineffective, but even lent it all the cheapness of acting. And as if to accent his simulation of a part, his fingers, feebly groping in his shirt bosom, slipped aimlessly and helplessly from the shining handle of a pistol in his pocket to wander hesitatingly towards the bottle on the counter.

Harkutt took the bottle, poured out a glass of the liquor, and pushed it before his companion, who drank it eagerly. Whether it gave him more confidence, or his attention was no longer diverted, he went on more collectedly and cheerfully, and with no trace of his previous desperation in his manner. "Come, Harkutt, buy my place. It 's a bargain, I tell you. I 'll sell it cheap. I only want enough to get away with. Give me twenty-five dollars and it 's yours. See, there 's the papers — the quitclaim — all drawn up and signed." He drew the roll of paper from his pocket again, apparently forgetful of the adjacent weapon.

"Look here, 'Lige," said Harkutt, with a businesslike straightening of his lips, "I ain't buyin' any land in Tasajara, — least of all yours on the creek. I 've got more invested here already than I 'll ever get back again. But I tell you what I 'll do. You say you can't go back to your shanty. Well, seein' how rough it is outside, and that the waters of the creek are probably all over the trail by this time, I reckon you 're about right. Now, there 's five dollars!" He laid down a coin sharply on the counter. "Take that and go over to Rawlett's and get a bed and some supper. In the mornin' you may be able to strike up a trade with somebody else — or change your mind. How did you get here? On your hoss?"

"Yes."

"He ain't starved yet?"

"No; he can eat grass. I can't."

Either the liquor or Harkutt's practical unsentimental treatment of the situation seemed to give him confidence. He met Harkutt's eye more steadily as the latter went on. "You kin turn your hoss for the night into my stock corral next to Rawlett's. It 'll save you payin' for fodder and stablin'."

The man took up the coin with a certain slow gravity which was almost like dignity. "Thank you," he said, laying the paper on the counter. "I 'll leave that as security."

"Don't want it, 'Lige," said Harkutt, pushing it back.

"I 'd rather leave it."

"But suppose you have a chance to sell it to somebody at Rawlett's?" continued Harkutt, with a precaution that seemed ironical.

"I don't think there 's much chance of that."

He remained quiet, looking at Harkutt with an odd expression as he rubbed the edge of the coin that he held between his fingers abstractedly on the counter. Something in his gaze — rather, perhaps, the apparent absence of anything in it approximate to the present occasion — was beginning to affect Harkutt with a vague uneasiness. Providentially a resumed onslaught of wind and rain against the panes effected a diversion. "Come," he said, with brisk practicality, "you 'd better hurry on to Rawlett's before it gets worse. Have your clothes dried by his fire, take suthin' to eat, and you 'll be all right." He rubbed his hands cheerfully, as if summarily disposing of the situation, and incidentally of all 'Lige's troubles, and walked with him to the door. Nevertheless, as the man's look remained unchanged, he hesitated a moment with his hand on the handle, in the hope that he would say something, even if only to repeat his appeal, but he did not. Then Harkutt

opened the door· the man moved mechanically out, and at the distance of a few feet seemed to melt into the rain and darkness. Harkutt remained for a moment with his face pressed against the glass. After an interval he thought he heard the faint splash of hoofs in the shallows of the road; he opened the door softly and looked out.

The light had disappeared from the nearest house; only an uncertain bulk of shapeless shadows remained. Other remoter and more vague outlines near the horizon seemed to have a funereal suggestion of tombs and grave mounds, and one — a low shed near the road — looked not unlike a halted bier. He hurriedly put up the shutters in a momentary lulling of the wind, and, reëntering the store, began to fasten them from within.

While thus engaged an inner door behind the counter opened softly and cautiously, projecting a brighter light into the deserted apartment from some sacred domestic interior with the warm and wholesome incense of cooking. It served to introduce also the equally agreeable presence of a young girl, who, after assuring herself of the absence of every one but the proprietor, idly slipped into the store, and placing her rounded elbows, from which her sleeves were uprolled, upon the counter, leaned lazily upon them, with both hands supporting her dimpled chin, and gazed indolently at him; so indolently that, with her pretty face once fixed in this comfortable attitude, she was constrained to follow his movements with her eyes alone, and often at an uncomfortable angle. It was evident that she offered the final but charming illustration of the enfeebling listlessness of Sidon.

"So those loafers have gone at last," she said meditatively. "They 'll take root here some day, pop. The idea of three strong men like that lazing round for two mortal hours doin' nothin'. Well!" As if to emphasize her disgust she threw her whole weight upon the counter by

swinging her feet from the floor to touch the shelves behind her.

Mr. Harkutt only replied by a slight grunt as he continued to screw on the shutters.

"Want me to help you, dad?" she said, without moving.

Mr. Harkutt muttered something unintelligible, which, however, seemed to imply a negative, and her attention here feebly wandered to the roll of paper, and she began slowly and lazily to read it aloud.

"'For value received, I hereby sell, assign, and transfer to Daniel D. Harkutt all my right, title, and interest in, and to the undivided half of, Quarter Section 4, Range 5, Tasajara Township' — hum — hum," she murmured, running her eyes to the bottom of the page. "Why, Lord! It 's that 'Lige Curtis!" she laughed. "The idea of *him* having property! Why, dad, you ain't been *that* silly!"

"Put down that paper, miss," he said aggrievedly; "bring the candle here, and help me to find one of these infernal screws that 's dropped."

The girl indolently disengaged herself from the counter and Elijah Curtis's transfer, and brought the candle to her father. The screw was presently found and the last fastening secured. "Supper gettin' cold, dad," she said, with a slight yawn. Her father sympathetically responded by stretching himself from his stooping position, and the two passed through the private door into inner domesticity, leaving the already forgotten paper lying with other articles of barter on the counter.

CHAPTER II

With the closing of the little door behind them they seemed to have shut out the turmoil and vibration of the storm. The reason became apparent when, after a few paces, they descended half a dozen steps to a lower landing. This disclosed the fact that the dwelling part of the Sidon General Store was quite below the level of the shop and the road, and on the slope of the solitary undulation of the Tasajara plain, — a little ravine that fell away to a brawling stream below. The only arboreous growth of Tasajara clothed its banks in the shape of willows and alders that set compactly around the quaint, irregular dwelling which straggled down the ravine and looked upon a slope of bracken and foliage on either side. The transition from the black, treeless, storm-swept plain to this sheltered declivity was striking and suggestive. From the opposite bank one might fancy that the youthful and original dwelling had ambitiously mounted the crest, but, appalled at the dreary prospect beyond, had gone no further; while from the road it seemed as if the fastidious proprietor had tried to draw a line between the vulgar trading-post, with which he was obliged to face the coarser civilization of the place, and the privacy of his domestic life. The real fact, however, was that the ravine furnished wood and water; and as Nature also provided one wall of the house, — as in the well-known example of aboriginal cave dwellings, — its peculiar construction commended itself to Sidon on the ground of involving little labor.

Howbeit, from the two open windows of the sitting-room

which they had entered only the faint pattering of dripping boughs and a slight murmur from the swollen brook indicated the storm that shook the upper plain, and the cool breath of laurel, syringa, and alder was wafted through the neat apartment. Passing through that pleasant rural atmosphere they entered the kitchen, a much larger room, which appeared to serve occasionally as a dining-room, and where supper was already laid out. A stout, comfortable-looking woman — who had, however, a singularly permanent expression of pained sympathy upon her face — welcomed them in tones of gentle commiseration.

"Ah, there you be, you two! Now sit ye right down, dears; *do*. You must be tired out; and you, Phemie, love, draw up by your poor father. There — that 's right. You 'll be better soon."

There was certainly no visible sign of suffering or exhaustion on the part of either father or daughter, nor the slightest apparent earthly reason why they should be expected to exhibit any. But, as already intimated, it was part of Mrs. Harkutt's generous idiosyncrasy to look upon all humanity as suffering and toiling; to be petted, humored, condoled with, and fed. It had, in the course of years, imparted a singularly caressing sadness to her voice, and given her the habit of ending her sentences with a melancholy cooing and an unintelligible murmur of agreement. It was undoubtedly sincere and sympathetic, but at times inappropriate and distressing. It had lost her the friendship of the one humorist of Tasajara, whose best jokes she had received with such heartfelt commiseration and such pained appreciation of the evident labor involved as to reduce him to silence.

Accustomed as Mr. Harkutt was to his wife's peculiarity, he was not above assuming a certain slightly fatigued attitude befitting it. "Yes," he said, with a vague sigh, "where 's Clemmy?"

"Lyin' down since dinner; she reckoned she would n't get up to supper," she returned soothingly. "Phemie 's goin' to take her up some sass and tea. The poor dear child wants a change."

"She wants to go to 'Frisco, and so do I, pop," said Phemie, leaning her elbow half over her father's plate. "Come, pop, say do, — just for a week."

"Only for a week," murmured the commiserating Mrs. Harkutt.

"Perhaps," responded Harkutt, with gloomy sarcasm, "ye would n't mind tellin' me how you 're goin' to get there, and where the money 's comin' from to take you? There 's no teamin' over Tasajara till the rain stops, and no money comin' in till the ranchmen can move their stuff. There ain't a hundred dollars in all Tasajara; at least there ain't been the first red cent of it paid across my counter for a fortnit! Perhaps if you do go you would n't mind takin' me and the store along with ye, and leavin' us there."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Harkutt, with sympathetic but shameless tergiversation. "Don't bother your poor father, Phemie, love; don't you see he 's just tired out? And you 're not eatin' anything, dad."

As Mr. Harkutt was uneasily conscious that he had been eating heartily in spite of his financial difficulties, he turned the subject abruptly. "Where 's John Milton?"

Mrs. Harkutt shaded her eyes with her hand, and gazed meditatively on the floor before the fire and in the chimney-corner for her only son, baptized under that historic title. "He was here a minit ago," she said doubtfully. "I really can't think where he 's gone. But," assuringly, "it ain't far."

"He 's skipped with one o' those story-books he 's borrowed," said Phemie. "He 's always doin' it. Like as not he 's reading with a candle in the wood-shed. We 'll all be burnt up some night."

"But he 's got through his chores," interposed Mrs. Harkutt deprecatingly.

"Yes," continued Harkutt aggrievedly; "but instead of goin' to bed, or addin' up bills, or takin' count o' stock, or even doin' sums or suthin' useful, he 's ruinin' his eyes and wastin' his time over trash." He rose and walked slowly into the sitting-room, followed by his daughter and a murmur of commiseration from his wife. But Mrs. Harkutt's ministration for the present did not pass beyond her domain, the kitchen.

"I reckon ye ain't expectin' anybody to-night, Phemie?" said Mr. Harkutt, sinking into a chair, and placing his slippered feet against the wall.

"No," said Phemie, "unless something possesses that sappy little Parmlee to make one of his visitations. John Milton says that out on the road it blows so you can't stand up. It 's just like that idiot Parmlee to be blown in here, and not have strength of mind enough to get away again."

Mr. Harkutt smiled. It was that arch yet approving, severe yet satisfied smile with which the deceived male parent usually receives any depreciation of the ordinary young man by his daughters. Euphemia was no giddy thing to be carried away by young men's attentions, — not she! Sitting back comfortably in his rocking-chair, he said, "Play something."

The young girl went to the closet and took from the top shelf an excessively ornamented accordion, — the opulent gift of a reckless admirer. It was so inordinately decorated, so gorgeous in the blaze of papier-maché, mother-of-pearl, and tortoise-shell on keys and keyboard, and so ostentatiously radiant in the pink silk of its bellows, that it seemed to overawe the plainly furnished room with its splendors. "You ought to keep it on the table in a glass case, Phemie," said her father admiringly.

"And have *him* think I worshiped it! Not me, indeed! He 's conceited enough already," she returned saucily.

Mr. Harkutt again smiled his approbation, then deliberately closed his eyes and threw his head back in comfortable anticipation of the coming strains.

It is to be regretted that in brilliancy, finish, and even cheerfulness of quality they were not up to the suggestions of the keys and keyboard. The most discreet and cautious effort on the part of the young performer seemed only to produce startlingly unexpected but instantly suppressed complaints from the instrument, accompanied by impatient interjections of "No, no," from the girl herself. Nevertheless, with her pretty eyebrows knitted in some charming distress of memory, her little mouth half open between an apologetic smile and the exertion of working the bellows, with her white, rounded arms partly lifted up and waving before her, she was pleasantly distracting to the eye. Gradually, as the scattered strains were marshaled into something like an air, she began to sing also, glossing over the instrumental weaknesses, filling in certain dropped notes and omissions, and otherwise assisting the ineffectual accordion with a youthful but not unmusical voice. The song was a lugubrious religious chant; under its influence the house seemed to sink into greater quiet, permitting in the intervals the murmur of the swollen creek to appear more distinct, and even the far moaning of the wind on the plain to become faintly audible. At last, having fairly mastered the instrument, Phemie got into the full swing of the chant. Unconstrained by any criticism, carried away by the sound of her own voice, and perhaps a youthful love for mere uproar, or possibly desirous to drown her father's voice, which had unexpectedly joined in with a discomposing bass, the conjoined utterances seemed to threaten the frail structure of their dwelling, even as the gale had distended the store behind them. When they ceased at last

it was in an accession of dripping from the apparently stirred leaves outside. And then a voice, evidently from the moist depths of the abyss below, called out: —

"Hullo, there!"

Phemie put down the accordion, said, "Who 's that now?" went to the window, lazily leaned her elbows on the sill, and peered into the darkness. Nothing was to be seen; the open space of dimly outlined landscape had that blank, uncommunicative impenetrability with which Nature always confronts and surprises us at such moments. It seemed to Phemie that she was the only human being present. Yet after the feeling had passed she fancied she heard the wash of the current against some object in the stream, half stationary and half resisting.

"Is any one down there? Is that you, Mr. Parmlee?" she called.

There was a pause. Some invisible auditor said to another, "It 's a young lady." Then the first voice rose again in a more deferential tone: "Are we anywhere near Sidon?"

"This is Sidon," answered Harkutt, who had risen, and was now quite obliterating his daughter's outline at the window.

"Thank you," said the voice. "Can we land anywhere here on this bank?"

"Run down, pop; they 're strangers," said the girl, with excited, almost childish eagerness.

"Hold on," called out Harkutt, "I 'll be thar in a moment!" He hastily thrust his feet into a pair of huge boots, clapped on an oilskin hat and waterproof, and disappeared through a door that led to a lower staircase. Phemie, still at the window, albeit with a newly added sense of self-consciousness, hung out breathlessly. Presently a beam of light from the lower depths of the house shot out into the darkness. It was her father with a bull's-

eye lantern. As he held it up and clambered cautiously down the bank, its rays fell upon the turbid rushing stream, and what appeared to be a rough raft of logs held with difficulty against the bank by two men with long poles. In its centre was a roll of blankets, a valise and saddle-bags, and the shining brasses of some odd-looking instruments.

As Mr. Harkutt, supporting himself by a willow branch that overhung the current, held up the lantern, the two men rapidly transferred their freight from the raft to the bank, and leaped ashore. The action gave an impulse to the raft, which, no longer held in position by the poles, swung broadside to the current and was instantly swept into the darkness.

Not a word had been spoken, but now the voices of the men rose freely together. Phemie listened with intense expectation. The explanation was simple. They were surveyors who had been caught by the overflow on Tasajara plain, had abandoned their horses on the bank of Tasajara Creek, and with a hastily constructed raft had intrusted themselves and their instruments to the current. "But," said Harkutt quickly, "there is no connection between Tasajara Creek and this stream."

The two men laughed. "There is *now*," said one of them.

"But Tasajara Creek is a part of the bay," said the astonished Harkutt, "and this stream rises inland and only runs into the bay four miles lower down. And I don't see how" —

"You 're almost twelve feet lower here than Tasajara Creek," said the first man, with a certain professional authority, "and that 's *why*. There 's more water than Tasajara Creek can carry, and it 's seeking the bay this way. Look," he continued, taking the lantern from Harkutt's hand and casting its rays on the stream, "that 's salt drift from the upper bay, and part of Tasajara Creek 's running

by your house now! Don't be alarmed," he added reassuringly, glancing at the staring storekeeper. "You 're all right here; this is only the overflow and will find its level soon."

But Mr. Harkutt remained gazing abstractedly at the smiling speaker. From the window above the impatient Phemie was wondering why he kept the strangers waiting in the rain while he talked about things that were perfectly plain. It was *so* like a man!

"Then there 's a waterway straight to Tasajara Creek?" he said slowly.

"There is, as long as this flood lasts," returned the first speaker promptly; "and a cutting through the bank of two or three hundred yards would make it permanent. Well, what 's the matter with that?"

"Nothin'," said Harkutt hurriedly. "I am only considerin'! But come in, dry yourselves, and take suthin'."

The light over the rushing water was withdrawn, and the whole prospect sank back into profound darkness. Mr. Harkutt had disappeared with his guests. Then there was the familiar shuffle of his feet on the staircase, followed by other more cautious footsteps that grew delicately and even courteously deliberate as they approached. At which the young girl, in some new sense of decorum, drew in her pretty head, glanced around the room quickly, reset the tidy on her father's chair, placed the resplendent accordion like an ornament in the exact centre of the table, and then vanished into the hall as Mr. Harkutt entered with the strangers.

They were both of the same age and appearance, but the principal speaker was evidently the superior of his companion; and although their attitude to each other was equal and familiar, it could be easily seen that he was the leader. He had a smooth, beardless face, with a critical expression of eye and mouth that might have been fastidious and

supercilious but for the kindly, humorous perception that tempered it. His quick eye swept the apartment and then fixed itself upon the accordion, but a smile lit up his face as he said quietly: —

"I hope we have n't frightened the musician away. It was bad enough to have interrupted the young lady."

"No, no," said Mr. Harkutt, who seemed to have lost his abstraction in the nervousness of hospitality. "I reckon she 's only lookin' after her sick sister. But come into the kitchen, both of you, straight off; and while you 're dryin' your clothes, mother 'll fix you suthin' hot."

"We only need to change our boots and stockings; we 've some dry ones in our pack downstairs," said the first speaker hesitatingly.

"I 'll fetch 'em up and you can change in the kitchen. The old woman won't mind," said Harkutt reassuringly. "Come along." He led the way to the kitchen; the two strangers exchanged a glance of humorous perplexity and followed.

The quiet of the little room was once more unbroken. A far-off commiserating murmur indicated that Mrs. Harkutt was receiving her guests. The cool breath of the wet leaves without slightly stirred the white dimity curtains, and somewhere from the darkened eaves there was a still, somnolent drip. Presently a hurried whisper and a half laugh appeared to be suppressed in the outer passage or hall. There was another moment of hesitation, and the door opened suddenly and ostentatiously, disclosing Phemie, with a taller and slighter young woman, her elder sister, at her side. Perceiving that the room was empty, they both said "Oh!" yet with a certain artificiality of manner that was evidently a lingering trace of some previous formal attitude they had assumed. Then without further speech they each selected a chair and a position, having first shaken out their dresses, and gazed silently at each other.

It may be said briefly that sitting thus — in spite of their unnatural attitude, or perhaps rather because of its suggestion of a photographic pose — they made a striking picture, and strongly accented their separate peculiarities. They were both pretty; but the taller girl, apparently the elder, had an ideal refinement and regularity of feature which was not only unlike Phemie, but gratuitously unlike the rest of her family, and as hopelessly and even wantonly inconsistent with her surroundings as was the elaborately ornamented accordion on the centre-table. She was one of those occasional creatures, episodical in the South and West, who might have been stamped with some vague ante-natal impression of a mother given to over-sentimental contemplation of books of beauty and albums rather than the family features; offspring of typical men and women, and yet themselves incongruous to any known local or even general type. The long swan-like neck, tendriled hair, swimming eyes, and small patrician head had never lived or moved before in Tasajara or the West, nor perhaps even existed except as a personified "Constancy," "Meditation," or the "Baron's Bride," in mezzotint or copperplate. Even the girl's common pink print dress, with its high sleeves and shoulders, could not conventionalize these original outlines; and the hand that rested stiffly on the back of her chair, albeit neither over-white nor well kept, looked as if it had never held anything but a lyre, a rose, or a good book. Even the few sprays of wild jessamine which she had placed in the coils of her waving hair, although a local fashion, became her as a special ornament.

The two girls kept their constrained and artificially elaborated attitude for a few moments, accompanied by the murmur of voices in the kitchen, the monotonous drip of the eaves before the window, and the far-off sough of the wind. Then Phemie suddenly broke into a constrained giggle, which she, however, quickly smothered as she had

the accordion, and with the same look of mischievous distress.

"I 'm astonished at you, Phemie," said Clementina in a deep contralto voice, which seemed even deeper from its restraint. "You don't seem to have any sense. Anybody 'd think you never had seen a stranger before."

"Saw him before you did," retorted Phemie pertly. But here a pushing of chairs and shuffling of feet in the kitchen checked her. Clementina fixed an abstracted gaze on the ceiling; Phemie regarded a leaf on the window-sill with photographic rigidity as the door opened to the strangers and her father.

The look of undisguised satisfaction which lit the young men's faces relieved Mr. Harkutt's awkward introduction of any embarrassment; and almost before Phemie was fully aware of it, she found herself talking rapidly and in a high key with Mr. Lawrence Grant, the surveyor, while her sister was equally, although more sedately, occupied with Mr. Stephen Rice, his assistant. But the enthusiasm of the strangers, and the desire to please and be pleased, was so genuine and contagious that presently the accordion was brought into requisition, and Mr. Grant exhibited a surprising faculty of accompaniment to Mr. Rice's tenor, in which both the girls joined.

Then a game of cards with partners followed, into which the rival parties introduced such delightful and shameless obviousness of cheating, and displayed such fascinating and exaggerated partisanship, that the game resolved itself into a hilarious *mêlée*, to which peace was restored only by an exhibition of tricks of legerdemain with the cards by the young surveyor. All of which Mr. Harkutt supervised patronizingly, with occasional fits of abstraction, from his rocking-chair; and later Mrs. Harkutt from her kitchen threshold, wiping her arms on her apron and commiseratingly observing that she "declared, the young folks looked better already."

But it was here a more dangerous element of mystery and suggestion was added by Mr. Lawrence Grant in the telling of Miss Euphemia's fortune from the cards before him, and that young lady, pink with excitement, fluttered her little hands not unlike timid birds over the cards to be drawn, taking them from him with an audible twitter of anxiety and great doubts whether a certain "fair-haired gentleman" was in hearts or diamonds.

"Here are two strangers," said Mr. Grant, with extraordinary gravity laying down the cards, "and here is a 'journey;' this is 'unexpected news,' and this ten of diamonds means 'great wealth' to you, which you see follows the advent of the two strangers and is some way connected with them."

"Oh, indeed," said the young lady, with great pertness and a toss of her head. "I suppose they 've got the money with them."

"No, though it reaches you through them," he answered, with unflinching solemnity. "Wait a bit, I have it! I see, I 've made a mistake with this card. It signifies a journey or a road. Queer! is n't it, Steve? It 's *the road.*"

"It is queer," said Rice, with equal gravity; "but it 's so. The road, sure!" Nevertheless, he looked up into the large eyes of Clementina with a certain confidential air of truthfulness.

"You see, ladies," continued the surveyor, appealing to them with unabashed rigidity of feature, "the cards don't lie! Luckily we are in a position to corroborate them. The road in question is a secret known only to us and some capitalists in San Francisco. In fact, even *they* don't know that it is feasible until *we* report to them. But I don't mind telling you now, as a slight return for your charming hospitality, that the road is *a railroad* from Oakland to Tasajara Creek, of which we 've just made the preliminary

survey. So you see what the cards mean is this: You 're not far from Tasajara Creek; in fact, with a very little expense your father could connect this stream with the creek, and have a *waterway straight to the railroad terminus.* That 's the wealth the cards promise; and if your father knows how to take a hint he can make his fortune!"

It was impossible to say which was the most dominant in the face of the speaker, the expression of assumed gravity or the twinkling of humor in his eyes. The two girls, with superior feminine perception, divined that there was much truth in what he said, albeit they did n't entirely understand it; and what they did understand — except the man's good-humored motive — was not particularly interesting. In fact, they were slightly disappointed. What had promised to be an audaciously flirtatious declaration, and even a mischievous suggestion of marriage, had resolved itself into something absurdly practical and businesslike.

Not so Mr. Harkutt. He quickly rose from his chair, and, leaning over the table, with his eyes fixed on the card as if it really signified the railroad, repeated quickly: 'Railroad, eh! What 's that? A railroad to Tasajara Creek? Ye don't mean it! — That is — it ain't a *sure* thing?"

"Perfectly sure. The money is ready in San Francisco now, and by this time next year" —

"A railroad to Tasajara Creek!" continued Harkutt hurriedly. "What part of it? Where?"

"At the embarcadero naturally," responded Grant. "There is n't but the one place for the terminus. There 's an old shanty there now belongs to somebody."

"Why, pop!" said Phemie, with sudden recollection, "ain't it 'Lige Curtis's house? The land he offered" —

"Hush!" said her father.

"You know, the one written in that bit of paper," continued the innocent Phemie.

"Hush! will you? God A'mighty! are you goin' to mind me? Are you goin' to keep up your jabber when I'm speakin' to the gentlemen? Is that your manners? What next, I wonder!"

The sudden and unexpected passion of the speaker, the incomprehensible change in his voice, and the utterly disproportionate exaggeration of his attitude towards his daughters, enforced an instantaneous silence. The rain began to drip audibly at the window, the rush of the river sounded distinctly from without, even the shaking of the front part of the dwelling by the distant gale became perceptible. An angry flash sprang for an instant to the young assistant's eye, but it met the cautious glance of his friend, and together both discreetly sought the table. The two girls alone remained white and collected. "Will you go on with my fortune, Mr. Grant?" said Phemie quietly.

A certain respect, perhaps not before observable, was suggested in the surveyor's tone as he smilingly replied, "Certainly, I was only waiting for you to show your confidence in me," and took up the cards.

Mr. Harkutt coughed. "It looks as if that blamed wind had blown suthin' loose in the store," he said affectedly. "I reckon I 'll go and see." He hesitated a moment and then disappeared in the passage. Yet even here he stood irresolute, looking at the closed door behind him, and passing his hand over his still flushed face. Presently he slowly and abstractedly ascended the flight of steps, entered the smaller passage that led to the back door of the shop, and opened it.

He was at first a little startled at the halo of light from the still glowing stove, which the greater obscurity of the long room had heightened rather than diminished. Then he passed behind the counter, but here the box of biscuits which occupied the centre and cast a shadow over it compelled him to grope vaguely for what he sought. Then he

stopped suddenly, the paper he had just found dropping from his fingers, and said sharply: —

"Who 's there?"

"Me, pop."

"John Milton?"

"Yes, sir."

"What the devil are you doin' there, sir?"

"Readin'."

It was true. The boy was half reclining in a most distorted posture on two chairs, his figure in deep shadow, but his book was raised above his head so as to catch the red glow of the stove on the printed page. Even then his father's angry interruption scarcely diverted his preoccupation; he raised himself in his chair mechanically, with his eyes still fixed on his book. Seeing which his father quickly regained the paper, but continued his objurgation.

"How dare you? Clear off to bed, will you! Do you hear me? Pretty goin's on," he added, as if to justify his indignation. "Sneakin' in here and — and lyin' round at this time o' night! Why, if I had n't come in here to" —

"What?" asked the boy mechanically, catching vaguely at the unfinished sentence and staring automatically at the paper in his father's hand.

"Nothin', sir! Go to bed, I tell you! Will you? What are you standin' gawpin' at?" continued Harkutt furiously.

The boy regained his feet slowly and passed his father, but not without noticing, with the same listless yet ineffaceable perception of childhood, that he was hurriedly concealing the paper in his pocket. With the same youthful inconsequence, wondering at this more than at the interruption, which was no novel event, he went slowly out of the room.

Harkutt listened to the retreating tread of his bare feet in the passage, and then carefully locked the door. Taking the paper from his pocket, and borrowing the idea he had

just objurgated in his son, he turned it towards the dull glow of the stove and attempted to read it. But perhaps lacking the patience as well as the keener sight of youth, he was forced to relight the candle which he had left on the counter, and reperused the paper. Yes! there was certainly no mistake! Here was the actual description of the property which the surveyor had just indicated as the future terminus of the new railroad, and here it was conveyed to him — Daniel Harkutt! What was that? Somebody knocking? What did this continual interruption mean? An odd superstitious fear now mingled with his irritation.

The sound appeared to come from the front shutters. It suddenly occurred to him that the light might be visible through the crevices. He hurriedly extinguished it, and went to the door.

"Who 's there?"

"Me, — Peters. Want to speak to you."

Mr. Harkutt with evident reluctance drew the bolts. The wind, still boisterous and besieging, did the rest, and precipitately propelled Peters through the carefully guarded opening. But his surprise at finding himself in the darkness seemed to forestall any explanation of his visit.

"Well," he said, with an odd mingling of reproach and suspicion. "I declare I saw a light here just this minit! That 's queer."

"Yes, I put it out just now. I was goin' away," replied Harkutt, with ill-disguised impatience.

"What! been here ever since?"

"No," said Harkutt curtly.

"Well, I want to speak to ye about 'Lige. Seein' the candle shinin' through the chinks I thought he might be still with ye. If he ain't, it looks bad. Light up, can't ye! I want to show you something."

There was a peremptoriness in his tone that struck Har-

kutt disagreeably; but observing that he was carrying something in his hand, he somewhat nervously relit the candle and faced him. Peters had a hat in his hand. It was 'Lige's!

"'Bout an hour after we fellers left here," said Peters, "I heard the rattlin' of hoofs on the road, and then it seemed to stop just by my house. I went out with a lantern, and, darn my skin! if there warn't 'Lige's hoss, the saddle empty, and 'Lige nowhere! I looked round and called him — but nothing were to be seen. Thinkin' he might have slipped off, — though ez a general rule drunken men don't, and he is a good rider, — I followed down the road, lookin' for him. I kept on follerin' it down to your run, half a mile below."

"But," began Harkutt, with a quick nervous laugh, "you don't reckon that because of that he" —

"Hold on!" said Peters, grimly producing a revolver from his side pocket with the stock and barrel clogged and streaked with mud. "I found *that*, too, — and look! one barrel discharged! And," he added hurriedly, as approaching a climax, "look ye, — what I nat'rally took for wet from the rain — inside that hat — was — blood!"

"Nonsense!" said Harkutt, putting the hat aside with a new fastidiousness. "You don't think" —

"I think," said Peters, lowering his voice, — "I think, by God! *he 's bin and done it!*"

"No!"

"Sure! Oh, it 's all very well for Billings and the rest of that conceited crowd to sneer and sling their ideas of 'Lige gen'rally as they did jess now here, — but I 'd like 'em to see *that.*" It was difficult to tell if Mr. Peters' triumphant delight in confuting his late companions' theories had not even usurped in his mind the importance of the news he brought, as it had of any human sympathy with it.

"Look here," returned Harkutt earnestly, yet with a singularly cleared brow and a more natural manner. "You ought to take them things over to Squire Kerby's, right off, and show 'em to him. You kin tell him how you left 'Lige here, and say that I can prove by my daughter that he went away about ten minutes after, — at least, not more than fifteen." Like all unprofessional humanity, Mr. Harkutt had an exaggerated conception of the majesty of unimportant detail in the eye of the law. "I 'd go with you myself," he added quickly, "but I 've got company — strangers — here."

"How did he look when he left, — kinder wild?" suggested Peters.

Harkutt had begun to feel the prudence of present reticence. "Well," he said cautiously, "*you* saw how he looked."

"You was n't rough with him? — that might have sent him off, you know," said Peters.

"No," said Harkutt, forgetting himself in a quick indignation, — "no, I not only treated him to another drink, but gave him" — he stopped suddenly and awkwardly.

"Eh?" said Peters.

"Some good advice, — you know," said Harkutt hastily. "But come, you 'd better hurry over to the squire's. You know *you* 've made the discovery; *your* evidence is important, and there 's a law that obliges you to give information at once."

The excitement of discovery and the triumph over his disputants being spent, Peters, after the Sidon fashion, evidently did not relish activity as a duty. "You know," he said dubiously, "he might n't be dead, after all."

Harkutt became a trifle distant. "You know your own opinion of the thing," he replied after a pause. "You 've circumstantial evidence enough to see the squire, and set others to work on it; and," he added significantly, "you 've

done your share then, and can wipe your hands of it, eh?"

"That's so," said Peters eagerly. "I'll just run over to the squire."

"And on account of the women-folks, you know, and the strangers here, I'll say nothin' about it to-night," added Harkutt.

Peters nodded his head, and, taking up the hat of the unfortunate Elijah with a certain hesitation, as if he feared it had already lost its dramatic intensity as a witness, disappeared into the storm and darkness again. A lurking gust of wind lying in ambush somewhere seemed to swoop down on him as if to prevent further indecision and whirl him away in the direction of the justice's house; and Mr. Harkutt shut the door, bolted it, and walked aimlessly back to the counter.

From a slow, deliberate, and cautious man, he seemed to have changed within an hour to an irresolute and capricious one. He took the paper from his pocket, and, unlocking the money-drawer of his counter, folded into a small compass that which now seemed to be the last testament of Elijah Curtis, and placed it in a recess. Then he went to the back door and paused, then returned, reopened the money-drawer, took out the paper, and again buttoned it in his hip pocket, standing by the stove and staring abstractedly at the dull glow of the fire. He even went through the mechanical process of raking down the ashes, — solely to gain time and as an excuse for delaying some other necessary action.

He was thinking what he should do. Had the question of his right to retain and make use of that paper been squarely offered to him an hour ago, he would without doubt have decided that he ought not to keep it. Even now, looking at it as an abstract principle, he did not deceive himself in the least. But Nature has the reprehen-

sible habit of not presenting these questions to us squarely and fairly, and it is remarkable that in most of our offending the abstract principle is never the direct issue. Mr. Harkutt was conscious of having been unwillingly led, step by step, into a difficult, not to say dishonest situation, and against his own seeking. He had never asked Elijah to sell him the property; he had distinctly declined it; it had even been forced upon him as security for the pittance he so freely gave him. This proved (to himself) that he himself was honest; it was only the circumstances that were queer. Of course if Elijah had lived, he, Harkutt, might have tried to drive some bargain with him before the news of the railroad survey came out — for *that* was only business. But now that Elijah was dead, who would be a penny the worse or better but himself if he chose to consider the whole thing as a lucky speculation, and his gift of five dollars as the price he paid for it? Nobody could think that he had calculated upon 'Lige's suicide, any more than that the property would become valuable. In fact, if it came to that, if 'Lige had really contemplated killing himself as a hopeless bankrupt after taking Harkutt's money as a loan, it was a swindle on his — Harkutt's — good nature. He worked himself into a rage, which he felt was innately virtuous, at this tyranny of cold principle over his own warm-hearted instincts, but if it came to the *law*, he 'd stand by law and not sentiment. He 'd just let them — by which he vaguely meant the world, Tasajara, and possibly his own conscience — see that he was n't a sentimental fool, and he 'd freeze on to that paper and that property!

Only he ought to have spoken out before. He ought to have told the surveyor at once that he owned the land. He ought to have said, "Why, that 's my land. I bought it of that drunken 'Lige Curtis for a song and out of charity." Yes, that was the only real trouble, and that came

from his own goodness, his own extravagant sense of justice and right, — his own cursed good nature. Yet on second thoughts, he did n't know why he was obliged to tell the surveyor. Time enough when the company wanted to buy the land. As soon as it was settled that 'Lige was dead he 'd openly claim the property. But what if he was n't dead? or they could n't find his body? or he had only disappeared? His plain, matter-of-fact face contracted and darkened. Of course he could n't ask the company to wait for him to settle that point. He had the power to dispose of the property under that paper, and — he should do it. If 'Lige turned up, that was another matter, and he and 'Lige could arrange it between them. He was quite firm here, and oddly enough quite relieved in getting rid of what appeared only a simple question of detail. He never suspected that he was contemplating the one irretrievable step, and summarily dismissing the whole ethical question.

He turned away from the stove, opened the back door, and walked with a more determined step through the passage to the sitting-room. But here he halted again on the threshold with a quick return of his old habits of caution. The door was slightly open; apparently his angry outbreak of an hour ago had not affected the spirits of his daughters, for he could hear their hilarious voices mingling with those of the strangers. They were evidently still fortune-telling, but this time it was the prophetic and divining accents of Mr. Rice addressed to Clementina which were now plainly audible.

"I see heaps of money and a great many friends in the change that is coming to you. Dear me! how many suitors! But I cannot promise you any marriage as brilliant as my friend has just offered your sister. You may be certain, however, that you 'll have your own choice in this, as you have in all things."

"Thank you for nothing," said Clementina's voice.

"But what are those horrid black cards beside them? — that 's trouble, I 'm sure."

"Not for you, though near you. Perhaps some one you don't care much for and don't understand will have a heap of trouble on your account, — yes, on account of these very riches; see, he follows the ten of diamonds. It may be a suitor; it may be some one now in the house, perhaps."

"He means himself, Miss Clementina," struck in Grant's voice laughingly.

"You 're not listening, Miss Harkutt," said Rice, with half-serious reproach. "Perhaps you know who it is?"

But Miss Clementina's reply was simply a hurried recognition of her father's pale face that here suddenly confronted her with the opening door.

"Why, it 's father!"

CHAPTER III

In his strange mental condition even the change from Harkutt's feeble candle to the outer darkness for a moment blinded Elijah Curtis, yet it was part of that mental condition that he kept moving steadily forward as in a trance or dream, though at first purposelessly. Then it occurred to him that he was really looking for his horse, and that the animal was not there. This for a moment confused and frightened him, first with the supposition that he had not brought him at all, but that it was part of his delusion; secondly, with the conviction that without his horse he could neither proceed on the course suggested by Harkutt, nor take another more vague one that was dimly in his mind. Yet in his hopeless vacillation it seemed a relief that now neither was practicable, and that he need do nothing. Perhaps it was a mysterious providence!

The explanation, however, was much simpler. The horse had been taken by the luxurious and indolent Billings unknown to his companions. Overcome at the dreadful prospect of walking home in that weather, this perfect product of lethargic Sidon had artfully allowed Peters and Wingate to precede him, and, cautiously unloosing the tethered animal, had safely passed them in the darkness. When he gained his own inclosure he had lazily dismounted, and, with a sharp cut on the mustang's haunches, sent him galloping back to rejoin his master, with what result has been already told by the unsuspecting Peters in the preceding chapter.

Yet no conception of this possibility entered Lige Cur-

tis's alcoholized consciousness, part of whose morbid phantasy it was to distort or exaggerate all natural phenomena. He had a vague idea that he could not go back to Harkutt's; already his visit seemed to have happened long, long ago, and could not be repeated. He would walk on, enwrapped in this uncompromising darkness which concealed everything, suggested everything, and was responsible for everything.

It was very dark, for the wind, having lulled, no longer thinned the veil of clouds above, nor dissipated a steaming mist that appeared to rise from the sodden plain. Yet he moved easily through the darkness, seeming to be upheld by it as something tangible, upon which he might lean. At times he thought he heard voices, — not a particular voice he was thinking of, but strange voices — of course unreal to his present fancy. And then he heard one of these voices, unlike any voice in Sidon, and very faint and far off, asking if it "was anywhere near Sidon?" — evidently some one lost like himself. He answered in a voice that seemed quite as unreal and as faint, and turned in the direction from which it came. There was a light moving like a will-o'-the-wisp far before him, yet below him as if coming out of the depths of the earth. It must be fancy, but he would see — ah!

He had fallen violently forward, and at the same moment felt his revolver leap from his breast pocket like a living thing, and an instant after explode upon the rock where it struck, blindingly illuminating the declivity down which he was plunging. The sulphurous sting of burning powder was in his eyes and nose, yet in that swift revealing flash he had time to clutch the stems of a trailing vine beside him, but not to save his head from sharp contact with the same rocky ledge that had caught his pistol. The pain and shock gave way to a sickening sense of warmth at the roots of his hair. Giddy and faint, his fingers relaxed,

he felt himself sinking, with a languor that was half acquiescence, down, down, — until, with another shock, a wild gasping for air, and a swift reaction, he awoke in the cold, rushing water!

Clear and perfectly conscious now, though frantically fighting for existence with the current, he could dimly see a floating black object shooting by the shore, at times striking the projections of the bank, until in its recoil it swung half round and drifted broadside on towards him. He was near enough to catch the frayed ends of a trailing rope that fastened the structure, which seemed to be a few logs, together. With a convulsive effort he at last gained a footing upon it, and then fell fainting along its length. It was the raft which the surveyors from the embarcadero had just abandoned.

He did not know this, nor would he have thought it otherwise strange that a raft might be a part of the drift of the overflow, even had he been entirely conscious; but his senses were failing, though he was still able to keep a secure position on the raft, and to vaguely believe that it would carry him to some relief and succor. How long he lay unconscious he never knew; in his after-recollections of that night, it seemed to have been haunted by dreams of passing dim banks and strange places; of a face and voice that had been pleasant to him; of a terror coming upon him as he appeared to be nearing a place like that home that he had abandoned in the lonely tules. He was roused at last by a violent headache, as if his soft felt hat had been changed into a tightening crown of iron. Lifting his hand to his head to tear off its covering, he was surprised to find that he was wearing no hat, but that his matted hair, stiffened and dried with blood and ooze, was clinging like a cap to his skull in the hot morning sunlight. His eyelids and lashes were glued together and weighted down by the same sanguinary plaster. He crawled to the edge

of his frail raft, not without difficulty, for it oscillated and rocked strangely, and dipped his hand in the current. When he had cleared his eyes he lifted them with a shock of amazement. Creeks, banks, and plain had disappeared; he was alone on a bend of the tossing bay of San Francisco!

His first and only sense — cleared by fasting and quickened by reaction — was one of infinite relief. He was not only free from the vague terrors of the preceding days and nights, but his whole past seemed to be lost and sunk forever in this illimitable expanse. The low plain of Tasajara, with its steadfast monotony of light and shadow, had sunk beneath another level, but one that glistened, sparkled, was instinct with varying life, and moved and even danced below him. The low palisades of regularly recurring tules that had fenced in, impeded, but never relieved the blankness of his horizon, were forever swallowed up behind him. All trail of past degradation, all record of pain and suffering, all footprints of his wandering and misguided feet were smoothly wiped out in that obliterating sea. He was physically helpless, and he felt it; he was in danger, and he knew it, — but he was free!

Happily there was but little wind and the sea was slight. The raft was still intact so far as he could judge, but even in his ignorance he knew it would scarcely stand the surges of the lower bay. Like most Californians who had passed the straits of Carquinez at night in a steamer, he did not recognize the locality, nor even the distant peak of Tamalpais. There were a few dotting sails that seemed as remote, as uncertain, and as unfriendly as sea-birds. The raft was motionless, almost as motionless as he was in his cramped limbs and sun-dried, stiffened clothes. Too weak to keep an upright position, without mast, stick, or oar to lift a signal above that vast expanse, it seemed impossible for him to attract attention. Even his pistol was gone.

Suddenly, in an attempt to raise himself, he was struck by a flash so blinding that it seemed to pierce his aching eyes and brain and turned him sick. It appeared to come from a crevice between the logs at the further end of the raft. Creeping painfully towards it he saw that it was a triangular slip of highly polished metal that he had hitherto overlooked. He did not know that it was a "flashing" mirror used in topographical observation, which had slipped from the surveyors' instruments when they abandoned the raft, but his excited faculties instinctively detected its value to him. He lifted it, and, facing the sun, raised it at different angles with his feeble arms. But the effort was too much for him; the raft presently seemed to be whirling with his movement, and he again fell.

. . . . . .

"Ahoy there!"

The voice was close upon — in his very ears. He opened his eyes. The sea still stretched emptily before him; the dotting sails still unchanged and distant. Yet a strange shadow lay upon the raft. He turned his head with difficulty. On the opposite side — so close upon him as to be almost over his head — the great white sails of a schooner hovered above him like the wings of some enormous sea-bird. Then a heavy boom swung across the raft, so low that it would have swept him away had he been in an upright position; the sides of the vessel grazed the raft, and she fell slowly off. A terrible fear of abandonment took possession of him; he tried to speak, but could not. The vessel moved further away, but the raft followed! He could see now it was being held by a boat-hook, — could see the odd, eager curiosity on two faces that were raised above the taffrail, and with that sense of relief his eyes again closed in unconsciousness.

A feeling of chilliness, followed by a grateful sensation of drawing closer under some warm covering, a stinging

taste in his mouth of fiery liquor and the aromatic steam of hot coffee, were his first returning sensations. His head, and neck were swathed in coarse bandages, and his skin stiffened and smarting with soap. He was lying in a rude berth under a half-deck, from which he could see the sky and the bellying sail, and presently a bearded face filled with rough and practical concern that peered down upon him.

"Hulloo! comin' round, eh? Hold on!"

The next moment the stranger had leaped down beside Elijah. He seemed to be an odd mingling of the sailor and ranchero with the shrewdness of a seaport trader.

"Hulloo, boss! What was it? A free fight or a wash-out?"

"A wash-out!"[1] Elijah grasped the idea as an inspiration. Yes, his cabin had been inundated, he had taken to a raft, had been knocked off twice or thrice, and had lost everything — even his revolver!

The man looked relieved. "Then it ain't a free fight, nor havin' your crust busted and bein' robbed by beach combers, eh?"

"No," said Elijah, with his first faint smile.

"Glad o' that," said the man bluntly. "Then thar ain't no police business to tie up to in 'Frisco? We were stuck thar a week once, just because we chanced to pick up a feller who 'd been found gagged and then thrown overboard by wharf thieves. Had to dance attendance at court thar and lost our trip." He stopped and looked half pathetically at the prostrate Elijah. "Look yer! ye ain't just dyin' to go ashore *now* and see yer friends and send messages, are ye?"

Elijah shuddered inwardly, but outwardly smiled faintly as he replied, "No!"

[1] A mining term for the temporary inundation of a claim by flood; also used for the sterilizing effect of flood on fertile soil.

"And the tide and wind jest servin' us now, ye would n't mind keepin' straight on with us this trip?"

"Where to?" asked Elijah.

"Santy Barbara."

"No," said Elijah, after a moment's pause. "I 'll go with you."

The man leaped to his feet, lifted his head above the upper deck, shouted, "Let her go free, Jerry!" and then turned gratefully to his passenger. "Look yer! A wash-out is a wash-out, I reckon, put it anyway you like; it don't put anything back into the land, or anything back into your pocket afterwards, eh? No! And yer well out of it, pardner! Now there 's a right smart chance for locatin' jest back of Santy Barbara, where thar ain't no God-forsaken tules to overflow; and ez far ez the land and licker lies ye 'need n't take any water in yours' ef ye don't want it. You kin start fresh thar, pardner, and brail up. What 's the matter with you, old man, is only fever 'n' agur ketched in them tules! I kin see it in your eyes. Now you hold on whar you be till I go forrard and see everything taut, and then I 'll come back and we 'll have a talk."

And they did. The result of which was that at the end of a week's tossing and seasickness, Elijah Curtis was landed at Santa Barbara, pale, thin, but self-contained and resolute. And having found favor in the eyes of the skipper of the Kitty Hawk, general trader, lumber-dealer, and ranchman, a week later he was located on the skipper's land and installed in the skipper's service. And from that day, for five years, Sidon and Tasajara knew him no more.

CHAPTER IV

It was part of the functions of John Milton Harkutt to take down the early morning shutters and sweep out the store for his father each day before going to school. It was a peculiarity of this performance that he was apt to linger over it, partly from the fact that it put off the evil hour of lessons, partly that he imparted into the process a purely imaginative and romantic element gathered from his latest novel-reading. In this he was usually assisted by one or two schoolfellows on their way to school, who always envied him his superior menial occupation. To go to school, it was felt, was a common calamity of boyhood that called into play only the simplest forms of evasion, whereas to take down actual shutters in a *bona fide* store, and wield a real broom that raised a palpable cloud of dust, was something that really taxed the noblest exertions. And it was the morning after the arrival of the strangers that John Milton stood on the veranda of the store ostentatiously examining the horizon, with his hand shading his eyes, as one of his companions appeared.

"Hollo, Milt! wot yer doin'?"

John Milton started dramatically, and then violently lashed at one of the shutters and began to detach it. "Ha!" he said hoarsely. "Clear the ship for action! Open the ports! On deck there! Steady, you lubbers!" In an instant his enthusiastic schoolfellow was at his side attacking another shutter. "A long, low schooner bearing down upon us! Lively, lads, lively!" continued John Milton, desisting a moment to take another dramatic look

at the distant plain. "How does she head now?" he demanded fiercely.

"Sou' by sou'east, sir," responded the other boy, frantically dancing before the window. "But she 'll weather it."

They each then wrested another shutter away, violently depositing them, as they ran to and fro, in a rack at the corner of the veranda. Added to an extraordinary and unnecessary clattering with their feet, they accompanied their movements with a singular hissing sound, supposed to indicate in one breath the fury of the elements, the bustle of the eager crew, and the wild excitement of the coming conflict. When the last shutter was cleared away, John Milton, with the cry "Man the starboard guns!" dashed into the store, whose floor was marked by the muddy footprints of yesterday's buyers, seized a broom, and began to sweep violently. A cloud of dust arose, into which his companion at once precipitated himself with another broom and a loud *bang!* to indicate the somewhat belated sound of cannon. For a few seconds the two boys plied their brooms desperately in that stifling atmosphere, accompanying each long sweep and puff of dust out of the open door with the report of explosions and loud *ha's!* of defiance, until not only the store, but the veranda was obscured with a cloud which the morning sun struggled vainly to pierce. In the midst of this tumult and dusty confusion — happily unheard and unsuspected in the secluded domestic interior of the building — a shrill little voice arose from the road.

"Think you 're mighty smart, don't ye?"

The two naval heroes stopped in their imaginary fury, and, as the dust of conflict cleared away, recognized little Johnny Peters gazing at them with mingled inquisitiveness and envy.

"Guess ye don't know what happened down the run last

night," he continued impatiently. "'Lige Curtis got killed, or killed hisself! Blood all over the rock down thar. Seed it, myseff. Dad picked up his six-shooter, — one barrel gone off. My dad was the first to find it out, and he 's bin to Squire Kerby tellin' him."

The two companions, albeit burning with curiosity, affected indifference and preknowledge.

"Dad sez your father druv 'Lige outer the store lass night! Dad sez your father 's 'sponsible. Dad sez your father ez good ez killed him. Dad sez the squire 'll set the constable on your father. Yah!" But here the small insulter incontinently fled, pursued by both the boys. Nevertheless, when he had made good his escape, John Milton showed neither a disposition to take up his former nautical rôle, nor to follow his companion to visit the sanguinary scene of Elijah's disappearance. He walked slowly back to the store and continued his work of sweeping and putting in order with an abstracted regularity, and no trace of his former exuberant spirits.

The first one of those instinctive fears which are common to imaginative children, and often assume the functions of premonition, had taken possession of him. The oddity of his father's manner the evening before, which had only half consciously made its indelible impression on his sensitive fancy, had recurred to him with Johnny Peters' speech. He had no idea of literally accepting the boy's charges; he scarcely understood their gravity; but he had a miserable feeling that his father's anger and excitement last night was because he had been discovered hunting in the dark for that paper of 'Lige Curtis's. It *was* 'Lige Curtis's paper, for he had seen it lying there. A sudden dreadful conviction came over him that he must never, never let any one know that he had seen his father take up that paper; that he must never admit it, even to *him*. It was not the boy's first knowledge of that attitude

of hypocrisy which the grown-up world assumes towards childhood, and in which the innocent victims eventually acquiesce with a Machiavellian subtlety that at last avenges them, — but it was his first knowledge that that hypocrisy might not be so innocent. His father had concealed something from him, because it was not right.

But if childhood does not forget, it seldom broods and is not above being diverted. And the two surveyors — of whose heroic advent in a raft John Milton had only heard that morning — with their traveled ways, their strange instruments, and stranger talk, captured his fancy. Kept in the background by his sisters when visitors came, as an unpresentable feature in the household, he, however, managed to linger near the strangers when, in company with Euphemia and Clementina, after breakfast they strolled beneath the sparkling sunlight in the rude garden inclosure along the sloping banks of the creek. It was with the average brother's supreme contempt that he listened to his sisters' "practicin'" upon the goodness of these superior beings; it was with an exceptional pity that he regarded the evident admiration of the strangers in return. He felt that in the case of Euphemia, who sometimes evinced a laudable curiosity in his pleasures and a flattering ignorance of his reading, this might be pardonable; but what any one could find in the useless statuesque Clementina passed his comprehension. Could they not see at once that she was "just that kind of person" who would lie abed in the morning, pretending she was sick, in order to make Phemie do the housework, and make him, John Milton, clean her boots and fetch things for her? Was it not perfectly plain to them that her present sickening politeness was solely with a view to extract from them caramels, rock-candy, and gum-drops, which she would meanly keep herself, and perhaps some "buggy-riding" later? Alas, John Milton, it was not! For standing there with her tall, per-

fectly proportioned figure outlined against a willow, an elastic branch of which she had drawn down by one curved arm above her head, and on which she leaned — as everybody leaned against something in Sidon — the two young men saw only a straying goddess in a glorified rosebud print. Whether the clearly cut profile presented to Rice, or the full face that captivated Grant, each suggested possibilities of position, pride, poetry, and passion that astonished while it fascinated them. By one of those instincts known only to the freemasonry of the sex, Euphemia lent herself to this advertisement of her sister's charms by subtle comparison with her own prettinesses, and thus combined against their common enemy, man.

"Clementina certainly is perfect, to keep her supremacy over that pretty little sister," thought Rice.

"What a fascinating little creature to hold her own against that tall, handsome girl," thought Grant.

"They 're takin' stock o' them two fellers so as to gabble about 'em when their backs is turned," said John Milton gloomily to himself, with a dismal premonition of the prolonged tea-table gossip he would be obliged to listen to later.

"We were very fortunate to make a landing at all last night," said Rice, looking down upon the still swollen current, and then raising his eyes to Clementina. "Still more fortunate to make it where we did. I suppose it must have been the singing that lured us on to the bank, — as, you know, the sirens used to lure people, — only with less disastrous consequences."

John Milton here detected three glaring errors; first, it was *not* Clementina who had sung; secondly, he knew that neither of his sisters had ever read anything about sirens, but he had; thirdly, that the young surveyor was glaringly ignorant of local phenomena and should be corrected.

"It 's nothin' but the current," he said, with that fever-

ish youthful haste that betrays a fatal experience of impending interruption. "It 's always leavin' drift and rubbish from everywhere here. There ain't anythin' that 's chucked into the creek above that ain't bound to fetch up on this bank. Why, there was two sheep and a dead hoss here long afore *you* thought of coming!" He did not understand why this should provoke the laughter that it did, and, to prove that he had no ulterior meaning, added with pointed politeness, "So *it is n't your fault*, you know — *you* could n't help it;" supplementing this with the distinct courtesy, "otherwise you would n't have come."

"But it would seem that your visitors are not all as accidental as your brother would imply, and one, at least, seems to have been expected last evening. You remember you thought we were a Mr. Parmlee," said Mr. Rice, looking at Clementina.

It would be strange indeed, he thought, if the beautiful girl were not surrounded by admirers. But without a trace of self-consciousness or any change in her reposeful face, she indicated her sister with a slight gesture, and said, "One of Phemie's friends. He gave her the accordion. She 's very popular."

"And I suppose *you* are very hard to please?" he said, with a tentative smile.

She looked at him with her large, clear eyes, and that absence of coquetry or changed expression in her beautiful face which might have stood for indifference or dignity as she said, "I don't know. I am waiting to see."

But here Miss Phemie broke in saucily with the assertion that Mr. Parmlee might not have a railroad in his pocket, but that at least he did n't have to wait for the Flood to call on young ladies, nor did he usually come in pairs, for all the world as if he had been let out of Noah's Ark, but on horseback and like a Christian by the front door. All this provokingly and bewitchingly delivered,

however, and with a simulated exaggeration that was incited apparently more by Mr. Lawrence Grant's evident enjoyment of it, than by any desire to defend the absent Parmlee.

"But where is the front door?" asked Grant laughingly.

The young girl pointed to a narrow zigzag path that ran up the bank beside the house until it stopped at a small picketed gate on the level of the road and store.

"But I should think it would be easier to have a door and private passage through the store," said Grant.

"*We* don't," said the young lady pertly; "we have nothing to do with the store. I go in to see paw sometimes when he 's shutting up and there 's nobody there, but Clem has never set foot in it since we came. It 's bad enough to have it and the lazy loafers that hang around it as near to us as they are; but paw built the house in such a fashion that we ain't troubled by their noise, and we might be t'other side of the creek as far as our having to come across them. And because paw has to sell pork and flour, we have n't any call to go there and watch him do it."

The two men glanced at each other. This reserve and fastidiousness were something rare in a pioneer community. Harkutt's manners certainly did not indicate that he was troubled by this sensitiveness; it must have been some individual temperament of his daughters. Stephen felt his respect increase for the goddess-like Clementina; Mr. Lawrence Grant looked at Miss Phemie with a critical smile.

"But you must be very limited in your company," he said; "or is Mr. Parmlee not a customer of your father's?"

"As Mr. Parmlee does not come to us through the store, and don't talk trade to me, we don't know," responded Phemie saucily.

"But have you no lady acquaintances — neighbors — who also avoid the store and enter only at the straight and

narrow gate up there?" continued Grant mischievously, regardless of the uneasy, half-reproachful glances of Rice.

But Phemie, triumphantly oblivious of any satire, answered promptly, "If you mean the Pike County Billingses who live on the turnpike road as much as they do off it, or the six daughters of that Georgia Cracker who wear men's boots and hats, we have n't."

"And Mr. Parmlee, your admirer?" suggested Rice. "Has n't he a mother or sisters here?"

"Yes, but they don't want to know us, and have never called here."

The embarrassment of the questioner at this unexpected reply, which came from the faultless lips of Clementina, was somewhat mitigated by the fact that the young woman's voice and manner betrayed neither annoyance nor anger.

Here, however, Harkutt appeared from the house with the information that he had secured two horses for the surveyors and their instruments, and that he would himself accompany them a part of the way on their return to Tasajara Creek, to show them the road. His usual listless deliberation had given way to a certain nervous but uneasy energy. If they started at once it would be better, before the loungers gathered at the store and confused them with lazy counsel and languid curiosity. He took it for granted that Mr. Grant wished the railroad survey to be a secret, and he had said nothing, as they would be pestered with questions. "Sidon was inquisitive — and old-fashioned." The benefit its inhabitants would get from the railroad would not prevent them from throwing obstacles in its way at first; he remembered the way they had acted with a proposed wagon road, — in fact, an idea of his own, something like the railroad; he knew them thoroughly, and if he might advise them, it would be to say nothing here until the thing was settled.

"He evidently does not intend to give us a chance,"

said Grant good humoredly to his companion, as they turned to prepare for their journey; "we are to be conducted in silence to the outskirts of the town like horse-thieves."

"But you gave him the tip for himself," said Rice reproachfully; "you cannot blame him for wanting to keep it."

"I gave it to him in trust for his two incredible daughters," said Grant, with a grimace. "But, hang it! if I don't believe the fellow has more concern in it than I imagined."

"But is n't she perfect?" said Rice, with charming abstraction.

"Who?"

"Clementina, and so unlike her father."

"Discomposingly so," said Grant quietly. "One feels in calling her 'Miss Harkutt' as if one were touching upon a manifest indiscretion. But here comes John Milton. Well, my lad, what can I do for you?"

The boy, who had been regarding them from a distance with wistful and curious eyes as they replaced their instruments for the journey, had gradually approached them. After a moment's timid hesitation he said, looking at Grant, "You don't know anybody in this kind o' business," pointing to the instruments, "who 'd like a boy, about my size?"

"I 'm afraid not, J. M.," said Grant cheerfully, without suspending his operation. "The fact is, you see, it 's not exactly the kind of work for a boy of your size."

John Milton was silent for a moment, shifting himself slowly from one leg to another as he watched the surveyor. After a pause he said, "There don't seem to be much show in this world for boys o' my size. There don't seem to be much use for 'em anyway." This not bitterly, but philosophically, and even politely, as if to relieve Grant's rejection of any incivility.

"Really you quite pain me, John Milton," said Grant, looking up as he tightened a buckle. "I never thought of it before, but you 're right."

"Now," continued the boy slowly, "with girls it 's just different. Girls of my size everybody does things for. There 's Clemmy, — she 's only two years older nor me, and don't know half that I do, and yet she kin lie about all day, and has n't to get up to breakfast. And Phemie, — who 's jest the same age, size, and weight as me, — maw and paw lets her do everything she wants to. And so does everybody. And so would you."

"But you surely don't want to be like a girl?" said Grant, smiling.

It here occurred to John Milton's youthful but not illogical mind that this was not argument, and he turned disappointedly away. As his father was to accompany the strangers a short distance, he, John Milton, was to-day left in charge of the store. That duty, however, did not involve any pecuniary transactions, — the taking of money or making of change, — but a simple record on a slate behind the counter of articles selected by those customers whose urgent needs could not wait Mr. Harkutt's return. Perhaps on account of this degrading limitation, perhaps for other reasons, the boy did not fancy the task imposed upon him. The presence of the idle loungers who usually occupied the armchairs near the stove, and occasionally the counter, dissipated any romance with which he might have invested his charge; he wearied of the monotony of their dull gossip, but mostly he loathed the attitude of hypercritical counsel and instruction which they saw fit to assume towards him at such moments. "Instead o' lazin' thar behind the counter when your father ain't here to see ye, John," remarked Billings from the depths of his armchair a few moments after Harkutt had ridden away, "ye orter be bustlin' round, dustin' the shelves. Ye 'll never

come to anythin' when you 're a man ef you go on like that. Ye never heard o' Harry Clay — that was called 'the Mill-boy of the Slashes' — sittin' down doin' nothin' when he was a boy."

"I never heard of him loafin' round in a grocery store when he was growned up either," responded John Milton darkly.

"P'r'aps you reckon he got to be a great man by standin' up sassin' his father's customers," said Peters angrily. "I kin tell ye, young man, if you was my boy" —

"If I was *your* boy, I 'd be playin' hookey instead of goin' to school, jest as your boy is doin' now," interrupted John Milton, with a literal recollection of his quarrel and pursuit of the youth in question that morning.

An undignified silence on the part of the adults followed, the usual sequel to those passages; Sidon generally declining to expose itself to the youthful Harkutt's terrible accuracy of statement.

The men resumed their previous lazy gossip about Elijah Curtis's disappearance, with occasional mysterious allusions in a lower tone, which the boy instinctively knew referred to his father, but which, either from indolence or caution, the two great conservators of Sidon, were never formulated distinctly enough for his relentless interference. The morning sunshine was slowly thickening again in an indolent mist that seemed to rise from the saturated plain. A stray lounger shuffled over from the blacksmith's shop to the store to take the place of another idler who had joined an equally lethargic circle around the slumbering forge. A dull intermittent sound of hammering came occasionally from the wheelwright's shed — at sufficiently protracted intervals to indicate the enfeebled progress of Sidon's vehicular repair. A yellow dog left his patch of sunlight on the opposite side of the way and walked deliberately over to what appeared to be more luxurious

quarters on the veranda; was manifestly disappointed but not equal to the exertion of returning, and sank down with blinking eyes and a regretful sigh without going further. A procession of six ducks got well into a line for a laborious "march past" the store, but fell out at the first mud puddle and gave it up. A highly nervous but respectable hen, who had ventured upon the veranda evidently against her better instincts, walked painfully on tiptoe to the door, apparently was met by language which no mother of a family could listen to, and retired in strong hysterics. A little later the sun became again obscured, the wind arose, rain fell, and the opportunity for going indoors and doing nothing was once more availed of by all Sidon.

It was afternoon when Mr. Harkutt returned. He did not go into the store, but entered the dwelling from the little picket gate and steep path. There he called a family council in the sitting-room as being the most reserved and secure. Mrs. Harkutt, sympathizing and cheerfully ready for any affliction, still holding a dust-cloth in her hand, took her seat by the window, with Phemie breathless and sparkling at one side of her, while Clementina, all faultless profile and repose, sat on the other. To Mrs. Harkutt's motherly concern at John Milton's absence, it was pointed out that he was wanted at the store, — was a mere boy anyhow, and could not be trusted. Mr. Harkutt, a little ruddier from weather, excitement, and the unusual fortification of a glass of liquor, a little more rugged in the lines of his face, and with an odd ring of defiant self-assertion in his voice, stood before them in the centre of the room.

He wanted them to listen to him carefully, to remember what he said, for it was important; it might be a matter of "lawing" hereafter, and he could n't be always repeating it to them, — he would have enough to do. There was a heap of it that, as women-folks, they could n't un-

derstand, and were n't expected to. But he 'd got it all clear now, and what he was saying was gospel. He 'd always known to himself that the only good that could ever come to Sidon would come by railroad. When those fools talked wagon road he had said nothing, but he had his own ideas; he had worked for that idea without saying anything to anybody; that idea was to get possession of all the land along the embarcadero, which nobody cared for, and 'Lige Curtis was ready to sell for a song. Well, now, considering what had happened, he did n't mind telling them that he had been gradually getting possession of it, little by little, paying 'Lige Curtis in advances and installments, until it was his own! They had heard what those surveyors said; how that it was the only fit terminus for the railroad. Well, that land, and that water-front, and the terminus were *his!* And all from his own foresight and prudence.

It is needless to say that this was not the truth. But it is necessary to point out that this fabrication was the result of his last night's cogitations and his morning's experience. He had resolved upon a bold course. He had reflected that his neighbors would be more ready to believe in and to respect a hard, mercenary, and speculative foresight in his taking advantage of 'Lige's necessities than if he had — as was the case — merely benefited by them through an accident of circumstance and good humor. In the latter case he would be envied and hated; in the former he would be envied and feared. By logic of circumstance the greater wrong seemed to be less obviously offensive than the minor fault. It was true that it involved the doing of something he had not contemplated, and the certainty of exposure if 'Lige ever returned, but he was nevertheless resolved. The step from passive to active wrongdoing is not only easy, it is often a relief; it is that return to sincerity which we all require. Howbeit, it gave that

ring of assertion to Daniel Harkutt's voice already noted, which most women like, and only men are prone to suspect or challenge. The incompleteness of his statement was, for the same reason, overlooked by his feminine auditors.

"And what is it worth, dad?" asked Phemie eagerly.

"Grant says I oughter get at least ten thousand dollars for the site of the terminus from the company, but of course I shall hold on to the rest of the land. The moment they get the terminus there, and the depot and wharf built, I can get my own price and buyers for the rest. Before the year is out Grant thinks it ought to go up ten per cent. on the value of the terminus, and that a hundred thousand."

"Oh, dad!" gasped Phemie, frantically clasping her knees with both hands as if to perfectly assure herself of this good fortune.

Mrs. Harkutt audibly murmured "Poor dear Dan'l," and stood, as it were, sympathetically by, ready to commiserate the pains and anxieties of wealth as she had those of poverty. Clementina alone remained silent, clear-eyed, and unchanged.

"And to think it all came through *them!*" continued Phemie. "I always had an idea that Mr. Grant was smart, dad. And it was real kind of him to tell you."

"I reckon father could have found it out without them. I don't know why we should be beholden to them particularly. I hope he is n't expected to let them think that he is bound to consider them our intimate friends just because they happened to drop in here at a time when his plans have succeeded."

The voice was Clementina's, unexpected but quiet, unemotional and convincing. "It seemed," as Mrs. Harkutt afterwards said, "as if the child had already touched that hundred thousand." Phemie reddened with a sense of convicted youthful extravagance.

"You need n't fear for me," said Harkutt, responding to Clementina's voice as if it were an echo of his own, and instinctively recognizing an unexpected ally. "I 've got my own ideas of this thing, and what 's to come of it. I 've got my own ideas of openin' up that property and showin' its resources. I 'm goin' to run it my own way. I 'm goin' to have a town along the embarcadero that 'll lay over any town in Contra Costa. I 'm goin' to have the court-house and county seat there, and a couple of hotels as good as any in the bay. I 'm goin' to build that wagon road through here that those lazy louts slipped up on, and carry it clear over to Five Mile Corner, and open up the whole Tasajara plain!"

They had never seen him look so strong, so resolute, so intelligent and handsome. A dimly prophetic vision of him in a black broadcloth suit and gold watch-chain addressing a vague multitude, as she remembered to have seen the Hon. Stanley Riggs, of Alasco, at the "Great Barbecue," rose before Phemie's blue enraptured eyes. With the exception of Mrs. Harkutt, — equal to any possibilities on the part of her husband, — they had honestly never expected it of him. They were pleased with their father's attitude in prosperity, and felt that perhaps he was not unworthy of being proud of them hereafter.

"But we 're goin' to leave Sidon," said Phemie, "ain't we, paw?"

"As soon as I can run up a new house at the embarcadero," said Harkutt peevishly, "and that 's got to be done mighty quick if I want to make a show to the company and be in possession."

"And that 's easier for you to do, dear, now that 'Lige 's disappeared," said Mrs. Harkutt consolingly.

"What do ye mean by that? What the devil are ye talkin' about?" demanded Harkutt suddenly with unexpected exasperation.

"I mean that that drunken 'Lige would be mighty poor company for the girls if he was our only neighbor," returned Mrs. Harkutt submissively.

Harkutt, after a fixed survey of his wife, appeared mollified. The two girls, who were mindful of his previous outburst the evening before, exchanged glances which implied that his manners needed correction for prosperity.

"You 'll want a heap o' money to build there, Dan'l," said Mrs. Harkutt in plaintive diffidence.

"Yes! Yes!" said Harkutt impatiently. "I 've kalkilated all that, and I 'm goin' to 'Frisco to-morrow to raise it and put this bill of sale on record." He half drew Elijah Curtis's paper from his pocket, but paused and put it back again.

"Then *that was* the paper, dad," said Phemie triumphantly.

"Yes," said her father, regarding her fixedly, "and you know now why I did n't want anything said about it last night — nor even now."

"And 'Lige had just given it to you! Was n't it lucky?"

"He *had n't* just given it to me!" said her father, with another unexpected outburst. "God A'mighty! ain't I tellin' you all the time it was an old matter! But you jabber, jabber all the time and don't listen! Where 's John Milton?" It had occurred to him that the boy might have read the paper — as his sister had — while it lay unheeded on the counter.

"In the store, — you know. You said he was n't to hear anything of this, but I 'll call him," said Mrs. Harkutt, rising eagerly.

"Never mind," returned her husband, stopping her reflectively, "best leave it as it is; if it 's necessary I 'll tell him. But don't any of you say anything, do you hear?"

Nevertheless a few hours later, when the store was mo-

mentarily free of loungers, and Harkutt had relieved his son of his monotonous charge, he made a pretense, while abstractedly listening to an account of the boy's stewardship, to look through a drawer as if in search of some missing article.

"You did n't see anything of a paper I left somewhere about here yesterday?" he asked carelessly.

"The one you picked up when you came in last night?" said the boy, with discomposing directness.

Harkutt flushed slightly and drew his breath between his set teeth. Not only could he place no reliance upon ordinary youthful inattention, but he must be on his guard against his own son as from a spy! But he restrained himself.

"I don't remember," he said, with affected deliberation, "what it was I picked up. Do you? Did you read it?"

The meaning of his father's attitude instinctively flashed upon the boy. He *had* read the paper, but he answered, as he had already determined, "No."

An inspiration seized Mr. Harkutt. He drew 'Lige Curtis's bill of sale from his pocket, and opening it before John Milton said, "Was it that?"

"I don't know," said the boy. "I could n't tell." He walked away with affected carelessness, already with a sense of playing some part like his father, and pretended to whistle for the dog across the street. Harkutt coughed ostentatiously, put the paper back in his pocket, set one or two boxes straight on the counter, locked the drawer, and disappeared into the back passage. John Milton remained standing in the doorway looking vacantly out. But he did not see the dull familiar prospect beyond. He only saw the paper his father had opened and unfolded before him. It was the same paper he had read last night. But there were three words written there *that were not there before!* After the words "Value received" there

had been a blank. He remembered that distinctly. This was filled in by the words, "Five hundred dollars." The handwriting did not seem like his father's, nor yet entirely like 'Lige Curtis's. What it meant he did not know, — he would not try to think. He should forget it, as he had tried to forget what had happened before, and he should never tell it to any one!

There was a feverish gayety in his sisters' manner that afternoon that he did not understand; short colloquies that were suspended with ill-concealed impatience when he came near them, and resumed when he was sent, on equally palpable excuses, out of the room. He had been accustomed to this exclusion when there were strangers present, but it seemed odd to him now, when the conversation did not even turn upon the two superior visitors who had been there, and of whom he confidently expected they would talk. Such fragments as he overheard were always in the future tense, and referred to what they intended to do. His mother, whose affection for him had always been shown in excessive and depressing commiseration of him in even his lightest moments, that afternoon seemed to add a prophetic and Cassandra-like sympathy for some vague future of his that would require all her ministration. "You won't need them new boots, Milty dear, in the changes that may be comin' to ye; so don't be bothering your poor father in his worriments over his new plans."

"What new plans, mommer?" asked the boy abruptly. "Are we goin' away from here?"

"Hush, dear, and don't ask questions that 's enough for grown folks to worry over, let alone a boy like you. Now be good," — a quality in Mrs. Harkutt's mind synonymous with ceasing from troubling, — "and after supper, while I 'm in the parlor with your father and sisters, you kin sit up here by the fire with your book."

"But," persisted the boy in a flash of inspiration, "is

popper goin' to join in business with those surveyors, — a surveyin'?"

"No, child, what an idea! Run away there, — and mind! — don't bother your father."

Nevertheless John Milton's inspiration had taken a new and characteristic shape. All this, he reflected, had happened since the surveyors came — since they had weakly displayed such a shameless and unmanly interest in his sisters! It could have but one meaning. He hung around the sitting-room and passages until he eventually encountered Clementina, taller than ever, evidently wearing a guilty satisfaction in her face, engrafted upon that habitual bearing of hers which he had always recognized as belonging to a vague but objectionable race whose members were individually known to him as "a proudy."

"Which of those two surveyor fellows is it, Clemmy?" he said, with an engaging smile, yet halting at a strategic distance.

"Is what?"

"Wot you 're goin' to marry."

"Idiot!"

"That ain't tellin' which," responded the boy darkly.

Clementina swept by him into the sitting-room, where he heard her declare that "really that boy was getting too low and vulgar for anything." Yet it struck him that, being pressed for further explanation, she did *not* specify why. This was "girls' meanness!"

Howbeit he lingered late in the road that evening, hearing his father discuss with the search party that had followed the banks of the creek, vainly looking for further traces of the missing 'Lige, the possibility of his being living or dead, of the body having been carried away by the current to the bay or turning up later in some distant marsh when the spring came with low water. One who had been to his cabin beside the embarcadero reported that

it was, as had been long suspected, barely habitable, and contained neither books, papers, nor records which would indicate his family or friends. It was a God-forsaken, dreary, worthless place; he wondered how a white man could ever expect to make a living there. If Elijah never turned up again it certainly would be a long time before any squatter would think of taking possession of it. John Milton knew instinctively, without looking up, that his father's eyes were fixed upon him, and he felt himself constrained to appear to be abstracted in gazing down the darkening road. Then he heard his father say, with what he felt was an equal assumption of carelessness, "Yes, I reckon I 've got somewhere a bill of sale of that land that I had to take from 'Lige for an old bill, but I kalkilate that 's all I 'll ever see of it."

Rain fell again as the darkness gathered, but he still loitered on the road and the sloping path of the garden, filled with a half-resentful sense of wrong, and hugging with gloomy pride an increasing sense of loneliness and of getting dangerously wet. The swollen creek still whispered, murmured, and swirled beside the bank. At another time he might have had wild ideas of emulating the surveyors on some extempore raft and so escaping his present dreary home existence; but since the disappearance of 'Lige, who had always excited an odd boyish antipathy in his heart, although he had never seen him, he shunned the stream contaminated with the missing man's unheroic fate. Presently the light from the open window of the sitting-room glittered on the wet leaves and sprays where he stood, and the voices of the family conclave came fitfully to his ear. They did n't want him there. They had never thought of asking him to come in. Well! — who cared? And he was n't going to be bought off with a candle and a seat by the kitchen fire. No!

Nevertheless he was getting wet to no purpose. There

was the tool-house and carpenter's shed near the bank; its floor was thickly covered with sawdust and pine-wood shavings, and there was a mouldy buffalo skin which he had once transported thither from the old wagon-bed. There, too, was his secret *cache* of a candle in a bottle, buried with other piratical treasures in the presence of the youthful Peters, who consented to be sacrificed on the spot in buccaneering fashion to complete the unhallowed rites. He unearthed the candle, lit it, and, clearing away a part of the shavings, stood it up on the floor. He then brought a prized, battered, and coverless volume from a hidden recess in the rafters, and, lying down with the buffalo robe over him, and his cap in his hand ready to extinguish the light at the first footstep of a trespasser, gave himself up — as he had given himself up, I fear, many other times — to the enchantment of the page before him.

The current whispered, murmured, and sang, unheeded at his side. The voices of his mother and sisters, raised at times in eagerness or expectation of the future, fell upon his unlistening ears. For with the spell that had come upon him, the mean walls of his hiding-place melted away; the vulgar stream beside him might have been that dim, subterraneous river down which Sindbad and his bale of riches were swept out of the Cave of Death to the sunlight of life and fortune, so surely and so simply had it transported him beyond the cramped and darkened limits of his present life. He was in the better world of boyish romance — of gallant deeds and high emprises; of miraculous atonement and devoted sacrifice; of brave men, and those rarer, impossible women — the immaculate conception of a boy's virgin heart. What mattered it that behind that glittering window his mother and sisters grew feverish and excited over the vulgar details of their real but baser fortune? From the dark tool-shed by the muddy current, John Milton, with a battered dogs'-eared chronicle, soared on the wings of fancy far beyond their wildest ken!

CHAPTER V

Prosperity had settled upon the plains of Tasajara. Not only had the embarcadero emerged from the tules of Tasajara Creek as a thriving town of steamboat wharves, warehouses, and outlying mills and factories, but in five years the transforming railroad had penetrated the great plain itself and revealed its undeveloped fertility. The low-lying lands that had been yearly overflowed by the creek, now drained and cultivated, yielded treasures of wheat and barley that were apparently inexhaustible. Even the helpless indolence of Sidon had been surprised into activity and change. There was nothing left of the straggling settlement to recall its former aspect. The site of Harkutt's old store and dwelling was lost and forgotten in the new mill and granary that rose along the banks of the creek. Decay leaves ruin and traces for the memory to linger over; prosperity is unrelenting in its complete and smiling obliteration of the past.

But Tasajara City, as the embarcadero was now called, had no previous record, and even the former existence of an actual settler like the forgotten Elijah Curtis was unknown to the present inhabitants. It was Daniel Harkutt's idea carried out in Daniel Harkutt's land, with Daniel Harkutt's capital and energy. But Daniel Harkutt had become Daniel Harcourt, and Harcourt Avenue, Harcourt Square, and Harcourt House, ostentatiously proclaimed the new spelling of his patronymic. When the change was made and for what reason, who suggested it and under what authority, were not easy to determine, as the sign on his

former store had borne nothing but the legend, *Goods and Provisions*, and his name did not appear on written record until after the occupation of Tasajara; but it is presumed that it was at the instigation of his daughters, and there was no one to oppose it. Harcourt was a pretty name for a street, a square, or a hotel; even the few in Sidon who had called it Harkutt admitted that it was an improvement quite consistent with the change from the fever-haunted tules and sedges of the creek to the broad, level, and handsome squares of Tasajara City.

This might have been the opinion of a visitor at the Harcourt House, who arrived one summer afternoon from the Stockton boat, but whose shrewd, half-critical, half-professional eyes and quiet questionings betrayed some previous knowledge of the locality. Seated on the broad veranda of the Harcourt House, and gazing out on the well-kept green and young eucalyptus-trees of the Harcourt Square or Plaza, he had elicited a counter-question from a prosperous-looking citizen who had been lounging at his side.

"I reckon you look ez if you might have been here before, stranger."

"Yes," said the stranger quietly, "I have been. But it was when the tules grew in the square opposite, and the tide of the creek washed them."

"Well," said the Tasajaran, looking curiously at the stranger, "I call myself a pioneer of Tasajara. My name 's Peters, — of Peters and Co., — and those warehouses along the wharf, where you landed just now, are mine; but I was the first settler on Harcourt's land, and built the next cabin after him. I helped to clear out them tules and dredged the channels yonder. I took the contract with Harcourt to build the last fifteen miles o' railroad, and put up that dépôt for the company. Perhaps you were here before that?"

"I was," returned the stranger quietly.

"I say," said Peters, hitching his chair a little nearer to his companion, "you never knew a kind of broken-down feller called Curtis — 'Lige Curtis — who once squatted here and sold his right to Harkutt? He disappeared; it was allowed he killed hisself, but they never found his body; and between you and me, I never took stock in that story. You know Harcourt holds under him, and all Tasajara rests on that title."

"I 've heard so," assented the stranger carelessly, "but I never knew the original settler. Then Harcourt has been lucky?"

"You bet. He 's got three millions right about *here*, or within this quarter section, to say nothing of his outside speculations."

"And lives here?"

"Not for two years. That 's his old house across the plaza, but his women-folks live mostly in 'Frisco and New York, where he 's got houses too. They say they sorter got sick of Tasajara after his youngest daughter ran off with a feller."

"Hallo!" said the stranger, with undisguised interest. "I never heard of that! You don't mean that she eloped" — he hesitated.

"Oh, it was a square enough marriage. I reckon too square to suit some folks; but that fellow had n't nothin', and was n't worth shucks, — a sort of land surveyor, doin' odd jobs, you know; and the old man and old woman were agin it, and the t'other daughter worse of all. It was allowed here — you know how women-folks talk! — that the surveyor had been sweet on Clementina, but had got tired of being played by her, and took up with Phemie out o' spite. Anyhow they got married, and Harcourt gave them to understand they could n't expect anything from him. P'r'aps that 's why it did n't last long, for only about two

months ago she got a divorce from Rice and came back to her family again."

"Rice?" queried the stranger. "Was that her husband's name, Stephen Rice?"

"I reckon! You knew him?"

"Yes, — when the tide came up to the tules, yonder," answered the stranger musingly. "And the other daughter, — I suppose she has made a good match, being a beauty and the sole heiress?"

The Tasajaran made a grimace. "Not much! I reckon she 's waitin' for the Angel Gabriel, — there ain't another good enough to suit her here. They say she 's had most of the big men in California waitin' in a line with their offers, like that cue the fellows used to make at the 'Frisco post-office steamer days — and she with nary a letter or answer for any of them."

"Then Harcourt does n't seem to have been as fortunate in his family affairs as in his speculations?"

Peters uttered a grim laugh. "Well, I reckon you know all about his son's stampeding with that girl last spring?"

"His son?" interrupted the stranger. "Do you mean the boy they called John Milton? Why, he was a mere child!"

"He was old enough to run away with a young woman that helped in his mother's house, and marry her afore a justice of the peace. The old man just snorted with rage, and swore he 'd have the marriage put aside, for the boy was under age. He said it was a put-up job of the girl's; that she was older by two years, and only wanted to get what money might be comin' some day, but that they 'd never see a red cent of it. Then, they say, John Milton up and sassed the old man to his face, and allowed that he would n't take his dirty money if he starved first, and that if the old man broke the marriage he 'd marry her again

next year; that true love and honorable poverty were better nor riches, and a lot more o' that stuff he picked out o' them ten-cent novels he was allus reading. My womenfolks say that he actually liked the girl, because she was the only one in the house that was ever kind to him; they say the girls were just ragin' mad at the idea o' havin' a hired gal who had waited on 'em as a sister-in-law, and they even got old Mammy Harcourt's back up by sayin' that John's wife would want to rule the house, and run her out of her own kitchen. Some say he shook *them*, talked back to 'em mighty sharp, and held his head a heap higher nor them. Anyhow, he 's livin' with his wife somewhere in 'Frisco, in a shanty on a sand lot, and workin' odd jobs for the newspapers. No! takin' it by and large — it don't look as if Harcourt had run his family to the same advantage that he has his land."

"Perhaps he does n't understand them as well," said the stranger, smiling.

"More 'n likely the material ain't thar, or ain't as vallyble for a new country," said Peters grimly. "I reckon the trouble is that he lets them two daughters run him; and the man who lets any woman or women do that lets himself in for all their meannesses, and all he gets in return is a woman's result, — show!"

Here the stranger, who was slowly rising from his chair with the polite suggestion of reluctantly tearing himself from the speaker's spell, said, "And Harcourt spends most of his time in San Francisco, I suppose?"

"Yes! but to-day he 's here to attend a directors' meeting and the opening of the Free Library and Tasajara Hall. I saw the windows open, and the blinds up in his house across the plaza as I passed just now."

The stranger had by this time quite effected his courteous withdrawal. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Peters," he said, smilingly lifting his hat, and turned away.

Peters, who was obliged to take his legs off the chair, and half rise to the stranger's politeness, here reflected that he did not know his interlocutor's name and business, and that he had really got nothing in return for his information. This must be remedied. As the stranger passed through the hall into the street, followed by the unwonted civilities of the spruce hotel clerk and the obsequious attentions of the negro porter, Peters stepped to the window of the office. "Who was that man who just passed out?" he asked.

The clerk stared in undisguised astonishment. "You don't mean to say you didn't know *who* he was — all the while you were talking to him?"

"No," returned Peters impatiently.

"Why, that was Professor Lawrence Grant! — *the* Lawrence Grant — don't you know? — the biggest scientific man and recognized expert on the Pacific slope. Why, that's the man whose single word is enough to make or break the biggest mine or claim going! That man! — why, that's the man whose opinion's worth thousands, for it carries millions with it — and can't be bought. That's him who knocked the bottom outer El Dorado last year, and next day sent Eureka up booming! Ye remember that, sure?"

"Of course — but" — stammered Peters.

"And to think you didn't know him!" repeated the hotel clerk wonderingly. "And here *I* was reckoning you were getting points from him all the time! Why, some men would have given a thousand dollars for your chance of talking to him — yes! — of even being *seen* talking to him. Why, old Wingate once got a tip on his Prairie Flower lead worth five thousand dollars while just changing seats with him in the cars and passing the time of day, sociable like. Why, what *did* you talk about?"

Peters, with a miserable conviction that he had thrown

away a valuable opportunity in mere idle gossip, nevertheless endeavored to look mysterious as he replied, "Oh, business gin'rally." Then in the faint hope of yet retrieving his blunder, he inquired, "How long will he be here?"

"Don't know. I reckon he and Harcourt 's got something on hand. He just asked if he was likely to be at home or at his office. I told him I reckoned at the house, or some of the family — I did n't get to see who they were — drove up in a carriage from the 3.40 train while you were sitting there."

Meanwhile the subject of this discussion, quite unconscious of the sensation he had created, or perhaps, like most heroes, philosophically careless of it, was sauntering indifferently towards Harcourt's house. But he had no business with his former host, — his only object was to pass an idle hour before his train left. He was, of course, not unaware that he himself was largely responsible for Harcourt's success; that it was *his* hint which had induced the petty trader of Sidon to venture his all in Tasajara; *his* knowledge of the topography and geology of the plain that had stimulated Harcourt's agricultural speculations; *his* hydrographic survey of the creek that had made Harcourt's plan of widening the channel to commerce practicable and profitable. This he could not help but know. But that it was chiefly owing to his own clear, cool, far-seeing, but never visionary, scientific observation — his own accurate analysis, unprejudiced by even a savant's enthusiasm, and uninfluenced by any personal desire or greed of gain — that Tasajara City had risen from the stagnant tules was a speculation that had never occurred to him. There was a much more uneasy consciousness of what he had done in Mr. Harcourt's face a few moments later, when his visitor's name was announced; and it is to be feared that if that name had been less widely honored and respected than it was, no merely grateful recollection of it would have

procured Grant an audience. As it was, it was with a frown and a touch of his old impatient asperity that he stepped to the threshold of an adjoining room and called, "Clemmy!"

Clementina appeared at the door.

"There 's that man Grant in the parlor. What brings *him* here, I wonder? Who does he come to see?"

"Who did he ask for?"

"Me, — but that don't mean anything."

"Perhaps he wants to see you on some business."

"No. That is n't his high-toned style. He makes other people go to him for that," he said bitterly. "Anyhow — don't you think it 's mighty queer his coming here after his friend — for it was he who introduced Rice to us — had behaved so to your sister, and caused all this divorce and scandal?"

"Perhaps he may know nothing about it; he and Rice separated long ago, even before Grant became so famous. We never saw much of him, you know, after we came here. Suppose you leave him to *me*. I 'll see him."

Mr. Harcourt reflected. "Did n't he used to be rather attentive to Phemie?"

Clementina shrugged her shoulders carelessly. "I dare say — but I don't think that *now*" —

"Who said anything about *now?*" retorted her father, with a return of his old abruptness. After a pause he said, "I 'll go down and see him first, and then send for you. You can keep him for the opening and dinner, if you like."

Meantime Lawrence Grant, serenely unsuspicious of these domestic confidences, had been shown into the parlor — a large room furnished in the same style as the drawing-room of the hotel he had just quitted. He had ample time to note that it was that wonderful Second Empire furniture which he remembered that the early San Francisco pioneers

in the first flush of their wealth, had imported directly from France, and which for years after gave an unexpected foreign flavor to the Western domesticity and a tawdry gilt equality to saloons and drawing-rooms, public and private. But he was observant of a corresponding change in Harcourt, when a moment later he entered the room. That individuality which had kept the former shopkeeper of Sidon distinct from, although perhaps not superior to, his customers was strongly marked. He was perhaps now more nervously alert than then; he was certainly more impatient than before, — but that was pardonable in a man of large affairs and action. Grant could not deny that he seemed improved, — rather, perhaps, that the setting of fine clothes, cleanliness, and the absence of petty worries made his characteristics respectable. That which is ill breeding in homespun is apt to become mere eccentricity in purple and fine linen; Grant felt that Harcourt jarred on him less than he did before, and was grateful without superciliousness. Harcourt, relieved to find that Grant was neither critical nor aggressively reminiscent, and above all not inclined to claim the credit of creating him and Tasajara, became more confident, more at his ease, and, I fear, in proportion more unpleasant. It is the repose and not the struggle of the parvenu that confounds us.

"And *you*, Grant, — you have made yourself famous, and, I hear, have got pretty much your own prices for your opinions ever since it was known that you — you — er — were connected with the growth of Tasajara."

Grant smiled; he was not quite prepared for this; but it was amusing and would pass the time. He murmured a sentence of half-ironical deprecation, and Mr. Harcourt continued: —

"I have n't got my San Francisco house here to receive you in, but I hope some day, sir, to see you there. We are only here for the day and night; but if you care to

attend the opening ceremonies at the new hall, we can manage to give you dinner afterwards. You can escort my daughter Clementina, — she 's here with me."

The smile of apologetic declination which had begun to form on Grant's lips was suddenly arrested. "Then your daughter is here?" he asked, with unaffected interest.

"Yes, — she is, in fact, a patroness of the library and sewing-circle, and takes the greatest interest in it. The Reverend Doctor Pilsbury relies upon her for everything. She runs the society, even to the training of the young ladies, sir. You shall see their exercises."

This was certainly a new phase of Clementina's character. Yet why should she not assume the rôle of Lady Bountiful with the other functions of her new condition. "I should have thought Miss Harcourt would have found this rather difficult with her other social duties," he said, "and would have left it to her married sister." He thought it better not to appear as if avoiding reference to Euphemia, although quietly ignoring her late experiences. Mr. Harcourt was less easy in his response.

"Now that Euphemia is again with her own family," he said ponderously, with an affectation of social discrimination that was in weak contrast to his usual direct business astuteness, "I suppose she may take her part in these things, but just now she requires rest. You may have heard some rumor that she is going abroad for a time? The fact is she has n't the least intention of doing so, nor do we consider there is the slightest reason for her going." He paused as if to give great emphasis to a statement that seemed otherwise unimportant. "But here 's Clementina coming, and I must get you to excuse *me*. I 've to meet the trustees of the church in ten minutes, but I hope she 'll persuade you to stay, and I 'll see you later at the hall."

As Clementina entered the room her father vanished and, I fear, as completely dropped out of Mr. Grant's mind.

For the daughter's improvement was greater than her father's, yet so much more refined as to be at first only delicately perceptible. Grant had been prepared for the vulgar enhancement of fine clothes and personal adornment, for the specious setting of luxurious circumstances and surroundings, for the *aplomb* that came from flattery and conscious power. But he found none of these; her calm individuality was intensified rather than subdued; she was dressed simply, with an economy of ornament, rich material, and jewelry, but an accuracy of taste that was always dominant. Her plain gray merino dress, beautifully fitting her figure, suggested, with its pale blue facings, some uniform, as of the charitable society she patronized. She came towards him with a graceful movement of greeting, yet her face showed no consciousness of the interval that had elapsed since they met; he almost fancied himself transported back to the sitting-room at Sidon with the monotonous patter of the leaves outside, and the cool moist breath of the bay and alder coming in at the window.

"Father says that you are only passing through Tasajara to-day, as you did through Sidon five years ago," she said, with a smiling earnestness that he fancied, however, was the one new phase of her character. "But I won't believe it! At least we will not accept another visit quite as accidental as that, even though you brought us twice the good fortune you did then. You see, we have not forgotten it if you have, Mr. Grant. And unless you want us to believe that your fairy gifts will turn some day to leaves and ashes, you will promise to stay with us to-night, and let me show you some of the good we have done with them. Perhaps you don't know, or don't want to know, that it was *I* who got up this 'Library and Home Circle of the Sisters of Tasajara' which we are to open to-day. And can you imagine why? You remember — or have you forgotten — that you once affected to be concerned at the so-

cial condition of the young ladies on the plains of Sidon! Well, Mr. Grant, this is gotten up in order that the future Mr. Grants who wander may find future Miss Billingses who are worthy to converse with them and entertain them, and who no longer wear men's hats and live on the public road."

It was such a long speech for one so taciturn as he remembered Clementina to have been; so unexpected in tone, considering her father's attitude towards him, and so unlooked for in its reference to a slight incident of the past, that Grant's critical contemplation of her gave way to a quiet and grateful glance of admiration. How could he have been so mistaken in her character? He had always preferred the outspoken Euphemia, and yet why should he not have been equally mistaken in her? Without having any personal knowledge of Rice's matrimonial troubles, — for their intimate companionship had not continued after the survey, — he had been inclined to blame him; now he seemed to find excuses for him. He wondered if she really had liked him as Peters had hinted; he wondered if she knew that he, Grant, was no longer intimate with him and knew nothing of her affairs. All this while he was accepting her proffered hospitality and sending to the hotel for his luggage. Then he drifted into a conversation, which he had expected would be brief, pointless, and confined to a stupid résumé of their mutual and social progress since they had left Sidon. But here he was again mistaken; she was talking familiarly of present social topics, of things that she knew clearly and well, without effort or attitude. She had been to New York and Boston for two winters; she had spent the previous summer at Newport; it might have been her whole youth for the fluency, accuracy, and familiarity of her detail, and the absence of provincial enthusiasm. She was going abroad, probably in the spring. She had thought of going to winter in Italy, but she would

wait now until her sister was ready to go with her. Mr. Grant of course knew that Euphemia was separated from Mr. Rice — no! — not until her father told him? Well — the marriage had been a wild and foolish thing for both. But Euphemia was back again with them in the San Francisco house; she had talked of coming to Tasajara to-day, perhaps she might be there to-night. And, good heavens! it was actually three o'clock already, and they must start at once for the hall. She would go and get her hat and return instantly.

It was true; he had been talking with her an hour — pleasantly, intelligently, and yet with a consciousness of an indefinite satisfaction beyond all this. It must have been surprise at her transformation, or his previous misconception of her character. He had been watching her features and wondering why he had ever thought them expressionless. There was also the pleasant suggestion — common to humanity in such instances — that he himself was in some way responsible for the change; that it was some awakened sympathy to his own nature that had breathed into this cold and faultless statue the warmth of life. In an odd flash of recollection he remembered how, five years ago, when Rice had suggested to her that she was "hard to please," she had replied that she "did n't know, but that she was waiting to see." It did not occur to him to wonder why she had not awakened then, or if this awakening had anything to do with her own volition. It was not probable that they would meet again after to-day, or if they did, that she would not relapse into her former self and fail to impress him as she had now. But — here she was — a paragon of feminine promptitude — already standing in the doorway, accurately gloved and booted, and wearing a demure gray hat that modestly crowned her decorously elegant figure.

They crossed the plaza side by side, in the still garish

sunlight that seemed to mock the scant shade of the youthful eucalyptus-trees, and presently fell in with the stream of people going in their direction. The former daughters of Sidon, the Billingses, the Peterses, and Wingates, were there bourgeoning and expanding in the glare of their new prosperity, with silk and gold; there were newer faces still, and pretty ones, — for Tasajara as a "Cow County" had attracted settlers with large families, — and there were already the contrasting types of East and West. Many turned to look after the tall figure of the daughter of the Founder of Tasajara, — a spectacle lately rare to the town; a few glanced at her companion, equally noticeable as a stranger. Thanks, however, to some judicious preliminary advertising from the hotel clerk, Peters, and Daniel Harcourt himself, by the time Grant and Miss Harcourt had reached the hall his name and fame were already known, and speculation had already begun whether this new stroke of Harcourt's shrewdness might not unite Clementina to a renowned and profitable partner.

The hall was in one of the further and newly opened suburbs, and its side and rear windows gave immediately upon the outlying and illimitable plain of Tasajara. It was a tasteful and fair-seeming structure of wood, surprisingly and surpassingly new. In fact, that was its one dominant feature; nowhere else had youth and freshness ever shown itself as unconquerable and all-conquering. The spice of virgin woods and trackless forests still rose from its pine floors, and breathed from its outer shell of cedar that still oozed its sap, and redwood that still dropped its life-blood. Nowhere else were the plastered walls and ceilings as white and dazzling in their unstained purity, or as redolent of the outlying quarry in their clear cool breath of lime and stone. Even the turpentine of fresh and spotless paint added to this sense of wholesome germination; and as the clear and brilliant Californian sun-

shine swept through the open windows west and east, suffusing the whole palpitating structure with its searching and resistless radiance, the very air seemed filled with the aroma of creation.

The fresh colors of the young Republic, the bright blazonry of the newest State, the coat-of-arms of the infant County of Tasajara — (a vignette of sunset-tules cloven by the steam of an advancing train) — hanging from the walls, were all a part of this invincible juvenescence. Even the newest silks, ribbons, and prints of the latest holiday fashions made their first virgin appearance in the new building as if to consecrate it, until it was stirred by the rustle of youth, as with the sound and movement of budding spring.

A strain from the new organ — whose heart, however, had prematurely learned its own bitterness — and a thin, clear, but somewhat shrill chanting from a choir of young ladies were followed by a prayer from the Reverend Mr. Pilsbury. Then there was a pause of expectancy; and Grant's fair companion, who up to that moment had been quietly acting as guide and cicerone to her father's guest, excused herself with a little grimace of mock concern, and was led away by one of the committee. Grant's usually keen eyes were wandering somewhat abstractedly over the agitated and rustling field of ribbons, flowers, and feathers before him, past the blazonry of banner on the walls, and through the open windows to the long sunlit levels beyond, when he noticed a stir upon the raised dais or platform at the end of the room, where the notables of Tasajara were formally assembled. The mass of black coats suddenly parted and drew back against the wall to allow the coming forward of a single graceful figure. A thrill of nervousness as unexpected as unaccountable passed over him as he recognized Clementina. In the midst of a sudden silence she read the report of the committee from a paper in her hand, in a clear, untroubled voice — the old voice of Sidon

— and formally declared the building opened. The sunlight, nearly level, streamed through the western window across the front of the platform where she stood and transfigured her slight but noble figure. The hush that had fallen upon the hall was as much the effect of that tranquil, ideal presence as of the message with which it was charged. And yet that apparition was as inconsistent with the clear, searching light which helped to set it off, as it was with the broad new blazonry of decoration, the yet unsullied record of the white walls, or even the frank, animated, and pretty faces that looked upon it. Perhaps it was some such instinct that caused the applause which hesitatingly and tardily followed her from the platform to appear polite and half restrained rather than spontaneous.

Nevertheless Grant was honestly and sincerely profuse in his congratulations. "You were far cooler and far more self-contained than *I* should have been in your place," he said, "than, in fact, I actually *was*, only as your auditor. But I suppose you have done it before?"

She turned her beautiful eyes on his wonderingly. "No, — this is the first time I ever appeared in public, — not even at school, for even there I was always a private pupil."

"You astonish me," said Grant; "you seemed like an old hand at it."

"Perhaps I did, or rather as if I did n't think anything of it myself, — and that, no doubt, is why the audience did n't think anything of it either."

So she *had* noticed her cold reception, and yet there was not the slightest trace of disappointment, regret, or wounded vanity in her tone or manner. "You must take me to the refreshment room now," she said pleasantly, "and help me to look after the young ladies who are my guests. I 'm afraid there are still more speeches to come, and father and Mr. Pilsbury are looking as if they confi-

dently expected something more would be 'expected' of them."

Grant at once threw himself into the task assigned to him with his natural gallantry and a certain captivating playfulness which he still retained. Perhaps he was the more anxious to please in order that his companion might share some of his popularity, for it was undeniable that Miss Harcourt still seemed to excite only a constrained politeness among those with whom she courteously mingled. And this was still more distinctly marked by the contrast of a later incident.

For some moments the sound of laughter and greeting had risen near the door of the refreshment room that opened upon the central hall, and there was a perceptible movement of the crowd — particularly of youthful male Tasajara — in that direction. It was evident that it announced the unexpected arrival of some popular resident. Attracted like the others, Grant turned and saw the company making way for the smiling, easy, half-saucy, half-complacent entry of a handsomely dressed young girl. As she turned from time to time to recognize with rallying familiarity or charming impertinence some of her admirers, there was that in her tone and gesture which instantly recalled to him the past. It was unmistakably Euphemia! His eyes instinctively sought Clementina's. She was gazing at him with such a grave, penetrating look, — half doubting, half wistful, — a look so unlike her usual unruffled calm that he felt strangely stirred. But the next moment, when she rejoined him, the look had entirely gone. "You have not seen my sister since you were at Sidon, I believe?" she said quietly. "She would be sorry to miss you." But Euphemia and her train were already passing them on the opposite side of the long table. She had evidently recognized Grant, yet the two sisters were looking intently into each other's eyes when he raised his own.

Then Euphemia met his bow with a momentary accession of color, a coquettish wave of her hand across the table, a slight exaggeration of her usual fascinating recklessness, and smilingly moved away. He turned to Clementina, but here an ominous tapping at the farther end of the long table revealed the fact that Mr. Harcourt was standing on a chair with oratorical possibilities in his face and attitude. There was another forward movement in the crowd and — silence. In that solid black-broadclothed, respectable figure, that massive watch-chain, that white waistcoat, that diamond pin glistening in the satin cravat, Euphemia might have seen the realization of her prophetic vision at Sidon five years before.

He spoke for ten minutes with a fluency and comprehensive businesslike directness that surprised Grant. He was not there, he said, to glorify what had been done by himself, his family, or his friends in Tasajara. Others who were to follow him might do that, or at least might be better able to explain and expatiate upon the advantages of the institution they had just opened, and its social, moral, and religious effect upon the community. He was there as a business man to demonstrate to them — as he had always done and always hoped to do — the money value of improvement; the profit — if they might choose to call it — of well-regulated and properly calculated speculation. The plot of land upon which they stood, of which the building occupied only one eighth, was bought two years before for ten thousand dollars. When the plans of the building were completed a month afterwards, the value of the remaining seven eighths had risen enough to defray the cost of the entire construction. He was in a position to tell them that only that morning the adjacent property, subdivided and laid out in streets and building plots, had been admitted into the corporate limits of the city; and that on the next anniversary of the building they would

approach it through an avenue of finished dwellings! An outburst of applause followed the speaker's practical climax; the fresh young faces of his auditors glowed with invincible enthusiasm; the afternoon trade-winds, freshening over the limitless plain beyond, tossed the bright banners at the windows as with sympathetic rejoicing; and a few odorous pine shavings, overlooked in a corner in the hurry of preparation, touched by an eddying zephyr, crept out and rolled in yellow ringlets across the floor.

The Reverend Doctor Pilsbury arose in a more decorous silence. He had listened approvingly, admiringly, he might say even reverently, to the preceding speaker. But although his distinguished friend had, with his usual modesty, made light of his own services and those of his charming family, he, the speaker, had not risen to sing his praises. No; it was not in this hall, projected by his foresight and raised by his liberality; in this town, called into existence by his energy and stamped by his attributes; in this county, developed by his genius and sustained by his capital; ay, in this very State whose grandeur was made possible by such giants as he, — it was not in any of these places that it was necessary to praise Daniel Harcourt, or that a panegyric of him would be more than idle repetition. Nor would he, as that distinguished man had suggested, enlarge upon the social, moral, and religious benefits of the improvement they were now celebrating. It was written on the happy, innocent faces, in the festive garb, in the decorous demeanor, in the intelligent eyes that sparkled around him, in the presence of those of his parishioners whom he could meet as freely here to-day as in his own church on Sunday. What then could he say? What then was there to say? Perhaps he should say nothing if it were not for the presence of the young before him. He stopped and fixed his eyes paternally on the youthful Johnny Billings, who with a half-dozen other Sunday-

school scholars had been marshaled before the reverend speaker. And what was to be the lesson *they* were to learn from it? They had heard what had been achieved by labor, enterprise, and diligence. Perhaps they would believe, and naturally, too, that what labor, enterprise, and diligence had done could be done again. But was that all? Was there nothing behind these qualities — which, after all, were within the reach of every one here? Had they ever thought that back of every pioneer, every explorer, every pathfinder, every founder and creator, there was still another? There was no *terra incognita* so rare as to be unknown to one; no wilderness so remote as to be beyond a greater ken than theirs; no waste so trackless but that one had already passed that way! Did they ever reflect that when the dull sea ebbed and flowed in the tules over the very spot where they were now standing, who it was that also foresaw, conceived, and ordained the mighty change that would take place; who even guided and directed the feeble means employed to work it; whose spirit moved, as in still older days of which they had read, over the face of the stagnant waters? Perhaps they had. Who, then, was the real pioneer of Tasajara, — back of the Harcourts, the Peterses, the Billingses, and Wingates? The reverend gentleman gently paused for a reply. It was given in the clear but startled accents of the half-frightened, half-fascinated Johnny Billings, in three words: —

"'Lige Curtis, sir!"

CHAPTER VI

The trade-wind, that, blowing directly from the Golden Gate, seemed to concentrate its full force upon the western slope of Russian Hill, might have dismayed any climber less hopeful and sanguine than that most imaginative of newspaper reporters and most youthful of husbands, John Milton Harcourt. But for all that it was an honest wind, and its dry, practical energy and salt-pervading breath only seemed to sting him to greater and more enthusiastic exertions, until, quite at the summit of the hill and last of a straggling line of little cottages half submerged in drifting sand, he stood upon his own humble porch.

"I was thinking, coming up the hill, Loo," he said, bursting into the sitting-room pantingly, "of writing something about the future of the hill! How it will look fifty years from now, all terraced with houses and gardens! — and right up here a kind of Acropolis, don't you know. I had quite a picture of it in my mind just now."

A plainly dressed young woman with a pretty face, that, however, looked as if it had been prematurely sapped of color and vitality, here laid aside some white sewing she had in her lap, and said: —

"But you did that once before, Milty, and you know the 'Herald' would n't take it because they said it was a free notice of Mr. Boorem's building lots, and he did n't advertise in the 'Herald.' I always told you that you ought to have seen Boorem first."

The young fellow blinked his eyes with a momentary arrest of that buoyant hopefulness which was their peculiar

characteristic, but nevertheless replied with undaunted cheerfulness, "I forgot. Anyhow, it 's all the same, for I worked it into that 'Sunday Walk.' And it 's just as easy to write it the other way, you see, — looking back, *down the hill*, you know. Something about the old padres toiling through the sand just before the Angelus; or as far back as Sir Francis Drake's time, and have a runaway boat's crew, coming ashore to look for gold that the Mexicans had talked of. Lord! that 's easy enough! I tell you what, Loo, it 's worth living up here just for the inspiration." Even while boyishly exhaling this enthusiasm he was also divesting himself of certain bundles whose contents seemed to imply that he had brought his dinner with him, — the youthful Mrs. Harcourt setting the table in a perfunctory, listless way that contrasted oddly with her husband's cheerful energy.

"You have n't heard of any regular situation yet?" she asked abstractedly.

"No, — not exactly," he replied. "But [buoyantly] it 's a great deal better for me not to take anything in a hurry and tie myself to any particular line. Now, I 'm quite free."

"And I suppose you have n't seen that Mr. Fletcher again?" she continued.

"No. He only wanted to know something about me. That 's the way with them all, Loo. Whenever I apply for work anywhere it 's always: 'So you 're Dan'l Harcourt's son, eh? Quarreled with the old man? Bad job; better make it up! You 'll make more stickin' to him. He 's worth millions!' Everybody seems to think everything of *him*, as if *I* had no individuality beyond that. I 've a good mind to change my name."

"And pray what would mine be then?"

There was so much irritation in her voice that he drew nearer her and gently put his arm around her waist.

"Why, whatever mine was, darling," he said, with a tender smile. "You did n't fall in love with any particular name, did you, Loo?"

"No, but I married a particular one," she said quickly.

His eyelids quivered again, as if he was avoiding some unpleasantly staring suggestion, and she stopped.

"You know what I mean, dear," she said, with a quick little laugh. "Just because your father 's an old crosspatch, *you* have n't lost your rights to his name and property. And those people who say you ought to make it up perhaps know what 's for the best."

"But you remember what he said of you, Loo?" said the young man, with a flashing eye. "Do you think I can ever forget that?"

"But you *do* forget it, dear; you forget it when you go in town among fresh faces and people; when you are looking for work. You forget it when you 're at work writing your copy, — for I 've seen you smile as you wrote. You forget it climbing up the dreadful sand, for you were thinking just now of what happened years ago, or is to happen years to come. And I want to forget it too, Milty. I don't want to sit here all day, thinking of it, with the wind driving the sand against the window, and nothing to look at but those white tombs in Lone Mountain Cemetery, and those white caps that might be gravestones too, and not a soul to talk to or even see pass by until I feel as if I were dead and buried also. If you were me — you — you — you — could n't help crying too!"

Indeed he was very near it now. For as he caught her in his arms, suddenly seeing with a lover's sympathy and the poet's swifter imagination all that she had seen and even more, he was aghast at the vision conjured. In her delicate health and loneliness how dreadful must have been these monotonous days, and this glittering, cruel sea! What a selfish brute he was! Yet as he stood there hold-

ing her, silently and rhythmically marking his tenderness and remorseful feelings by rocking her from side to side like a languid metronome, she quietly disengaged her wet lashes from his shoulder and said in quite another tone: —

"So they were all at Tasajara last week?"

"Who, dear?"

"Your father and sisters."

"Yes," said John Milton hesitatingly.

"And they 've taken back your sister after her divorce?"

The staring obtrusiveness of this fact apparently made her husband's bright sympathetic eye blink as before.

"And if you were to divorce me, *you* would be taken back too," she added quickly, suddenly withdrawing herself with a pettish movement and walking to the window.

But he followed. "Don't talk in that way, Loo! Don't look in that way, dear!" he said, taking her hand gently, yet not without a sense of some inconsistency in her conduct that jarred upon his own simple directness. "You know that nothing can part us now. I was wrong to let my little girl worry herself all alone here, but I — I — thought it was all so — so bright and free out on this hill, — looking far away beyond the Golden Gate, — as far as Cathay, you know, and such a change from those dismal flats of Tasajara and that awful stretch of tules. But it 's all right now. And now that I know how you feel, we 'll go elsewhere."

She did not reply. Perhaps she found it difficult to keep up her injured attitude in the face of her husband's gentleness. Perhaps her attention had been attracted by the unusual spectacle of a stranger, who had just mounted the hill and was now slowly passing along the line of cottages with a hesitating air of inquiry. "He may be looking for this house, — for you," she said in an entirely new tone of interest. "Run out and see. It may be some one who wants" —

"An article," said Milton cheerfully. "By Jove! he *is* coming here."

The stranger was indeed approaching the little cottage, and with apparently some confidence. He was a well-dressed, well-made man, whose age looked uncertain from the contrast between his heavy brown mustache and his hair, that, curling under the brim of his hat, was almost white in color. The young man started, and said hurriedly, "I really believe it is Fletcher, — they say his hair turned white from the Panama fever."

It was indeed Mr. Fletcher who entered and introduced himself, — a gentle, reserved man, with something of that colorlessness of premature age in his speech which was observable in his hair. He had heard of Mr. Harcourt from a friend who had recommended him highly. As Mr. Harcourt had probably been told, he, the speaker, was about to embark some capital in a first-class newspaper in San Francisco, and should select the staff himself. He wanted to secure only first-rate talent, — but above all, youthfulness, directness, and originality. The "Clarion," for that was to be its name, was to have nothing "old fogy" about it. No. It was distinctly to be the organ of Young California! This and much more from the grave lips of the elderly young man, whose speech seemed to be divided between the pretty, but equally faded, young wife and the one personification of invincible youth present, — her husband.

"But I fear I have interrupted your household duties," he said pleasantly. "You were preparing dinner. Pray go on. And let me help you, — I 'm not a bad cook, — and you can give me my reward by letting me share it with you, for the climb up here has sharpened my appetite. We can talk as we go on."

It was in vain to protest; there was something paternal as well as practical in the camaraderie of this actual capi-

talist and possible Mæcenas and patron as he quietly hung up his hat and overcoat, and helped to set the table with a practiced hand. Nor, as he suggested, did the conversation falter, and before they had taken their seats at the frugal board he had already engaged John Milton Harcourt as assistant editor of the "Clarion" at a salary that seemed princely to this son of a millionaire! The young wife, meantime, had taken active part in the discussion; whether it was vaguely understood that the possession of poetical and imaginative faculties precluded any capacity for business, or whether it was owing to the apparent superior maturity of Mrs. Harcourt and the stranger, it was certain that *they* arranged the practical details of the engagement, and that the youthful husband sat silent, merely offering his always hopeful and sanguine consent.

"You 'll take a house nearer to town, I suppose?" continued Mr. Fletcher to the lady, "though you 've a charming view here. I suppose it was quite a change from Tasajara and your father-in-law's house? I dare say he had as fine a place there — on his own homestead — as he has here?"

Young Harcourt dropped his sensitive eyelids again. It seemed hard that he could never get away from these allusions to his father! Perhaps it was only to that relationship that he was indebted for his visitor's kindness. In his simple honesty he could not bear the thought of such a misapprehension. "Perhaps, Mr. Fletcher, you do not know," he said, "that my father is not on terms with me, and that we neither expect anything nor could we ever take anything from him. Could we, Loo?" He added the useless question partly because he saw that his wife's face betrayed little sympathy with him, and partly that Fletcher was looking at her curiously, as if for confirmation. But this was another of John Milton's trials as an imaginative reporter: nobody ever seemed to care for his practical opinions or facts!

"Mr. Fletcher is not interested in our little family differences, Milty," she said, looking at Mr. Fletcher, however, instead of him. "You 're Daniel Harcourt's *son* whatever happens."

The cloud that had passed over the young man's face and eyes did not, however, escape Mr. Fletcher's attention, for he smiled, and added gayly, "And I hope my valued lieutenant in any case." Nevertheless John Milton was quite ready to avail himself of an inspiration to fetch some cigars for his guest from the bar of the Sea-View House on the slope of the hill beyond, and thereby avoid a fateful subject. Once in the fresh air again he promptly recovered his boyish spirits. The light flying scud had already effaced the first rising stars; the lower creeping sea-fog had already blotted out the western shore and sea; but below him to the east the glittering lights of the city seemed to start up with a new, mysterious, and dazzling brilliancy. It was the valley of diamonds that Sindbad saw lying almost at his feet! Perhaps somewhere there the light of his own fame and fortune was already beginning to twinkle!

He returned to his humble roof joyous and inspired. As he entered the hall he heard his wife's voice and his own name mentioned, followed by that awkward, meaningless silence on his entrance which so plainly indicated either that he had been the subject of conversation or that it was not for his ears. It was a dismal reminder of his boyhood at Sidon and Tasajara. But he was too full of hope and ambition to heed it to-night; and later, when Mr. Fletcher had taken his departure, his pent-up enthusiasm burst out before his youthful partner. Had she realized that their struggles were over now, that their future was secure? They need no longer fear ever being forced to take bounty from the family; they were independent of them all! He would make a name for himself that should be distinct from

his father's as he should make a fortune that would be theirs alone. The young wife smiled. "But all that need not prevent you, dear, from claiming your *rights* when the time comes."

"But if I scorn to make the claim or take a penny of his, Loo?"

"You say you scorn to take the money you think your father got by a mere trick, — at the best, — and did n't earn. And now you will be able to show you can live without it, and earn your own fortune. Well, dear, for that very reason why should you let your father and others enjoy and waste what is fairly your share? For it is *your* share whether it came to your father fairly or not; and if not, it is still your duty, believing as you do, to claim it from him, that at least *you* may do with it what you choose. You might want to restore it — to — to — somebody."

The young man laughed. "But, my dear Loo! suppose that I were weak enough to claim it, do you think my father would give it up? He has the right, and no law could force him to yield to me more than he chooses."

"Not the law, — but *you* could."

"I don't understand you," he said quickly.

"You could force him by simply telling him what you once told me."

John Milton drew back, and his hand dropped loosely from his wife's. The color left his fresh young face; the light quivered for a moment and then became fixed and set in his eyes. For that moment he looked ten years her senior. "I was wrong ever to tell even you that, Loo," he said in a low voice. "You are wrong to ever remind me of it. Forget it from this moment, as you value our love and want it to live and be remembered. And forget, Loo, as I do, — and ever shall, — that you ever suggested to me to use my secret in the way you did just now."

But here Mrs. Harcourt burst into tears, more touched by the alteration in her husband's manner, I fear, than by any contrition for wrong-doing. Of course if he wished to withdraw his confidences from her, just as he had almost confessed he wished to withdraw his *name*, she could n't help it; but it was hard that when she sat there all day long trying to think what was best for them, she should be blamed! At which the quiet and forgiving John Milton smiled remorsefully and tried to comfort her. Nevertheless an occasional odd, indefinable chill seemed to creep across the feverish enthusiasm with which he was celebrating this day of fortune. And yet he neither knew nor suspected until long after that his foolish wife had that night half betrayed his secret to the stranger!

The next day he presented a note of introduction from Mr. Fletcher to the business manager of the "Clarion," and the following morning was duly installed in office. He did not see his benefactor again; that single visit was left in the mystery and isolation of an angelic episode. It later appeared that other and larger interests in the San José valley claimed his patron's residence and attendance; only the capital and general purpose of the paper — to develop into a party organ in the interest of his possible senatorial aspirations in due season — were furnished by him. Grateful as John Milton felt towards him, he was relieved; it seemed probable that Mr. Fletcher *had* selected him on his individual merits, and not as the son of a millionaire.

He threw himself into his work with his old hopeful enthusiasm, and perhaps an originality of method that was part of his singular independence. Without the student's training or restraint, — for his two years' schooling at Tasajara during his parents' prosperity came too late to act as a discipline, — he was unfettered by any rules, and guided only by an unerring instinctive taste that became near being genius. He was a brilliant and original, if not always

a profound and accurate, reporter. By degrees he became an accustomed interest to the readers of the "Clarion;" then an influence. Actors themselves in many a fierce drama, living lives of devotion, emotion, and picturesque incident, they had satisfied themselves with only the briefest and most practical daily record of their adventure, and even at first were dazed and startled to find that many of them had been heroes and some poets. The stealthy boyish reader of romantic chronicle at Sidon had learned by heart the chivalrous story of the emigration. The second column of the "Clarion" became famous even while the figure of its youthful writer, unknown and unrecognized, was still nightly climbing the sands of Russian Hill, and even looking down as before on the lights of the growing city, without a thought that he had added to that glittering constellation.

Cheerful and contented with the exercise of work, he would have been happy but for the gradual haunting of another dread which presently began to drag him at earlier hours up the steep path to his little home; to halt him before the door with the quickened breath of an anxiety he would scarcely confess to himself, and sometimes hold him aimlessly a whole day beneath his roof. For the pretty but delicate Mrs. Harcourt, like others of her class, had added a weak and ineffective maternity to their other conjugal trials, and one early dawn a baby was born that lingered with them scarcely longer than the morning mist and exhaled with the rising sun. The young wife regained her strength slowly, — so slowly that the youthful husband brought his work at times to the house to keep her company. And a singular change had come over her. She no longer talked of the past, nor of his family. As if the little life that had passed with that morning mist had represented some ascending expiatory sacrifice, it seemed to have brought them into closer communion.

Yet her weak condition made him conceal another trouble that had come upon him. It was in the third month of his employment on the "Clarion" that one afternoon, while correcting some proofs on his chief's desk, he came upon the following editorial paragraph: —

"The played-out cant of 'pioneer genius' and 'pioneer discovery' appears to have reached its climax in the attempt of some of our contemporaries to apply it to Dan Harcourt's new Tasajara Job before the legislature. It is perfectly well known in Harcourt's own district that, far from being a pioneer and settler *himself*, he simply succeeded after a fashion to the genuine work of one Elijah Curtis, an actual pioneer and discoverer, years before, while Harcourt, we believe, was keeping a frontier doggery in Sidon, and dispensing 'tanglefoot' and salt junk to the hayfooted Pike Countians of his precinct. This would make him as much of the 'pioneer discoverer' as the rattlesnake who first takes up board and lodgings and then possession in a prairie-dog's burrow. And if the traveler's tale is true that the rattlesnake sometimes makes a meal of his landlord, the story told at Sidon may be equally credible that the original pioneer mysteriously disappeared about the time that Dan Harcourt came into the property. From which it would seem that Harcourt is not in a position for his friends to invite very deep scrutiny into his 'pioneer' achievements."

Stupefaction, a vague terror, and rising anger rapidly succeeded each other in the young man's mind as he stood mechanically holding the paper in his hand. It was the writing of his chief editor, whose easy brutality he had sometimes even boyishly admired. Without stopping to consider their relative positions he sought him indignantly and laid the proof before him. The editor laughed. "But what 's that to *you?* *You* 're not on terms with the old man."

"But he is my father!" said John Milton hotly.

"Look here," said the editor good naturedly, "I'd like to oblige you, but it isn't *business*, you know, — and this *is*, you understand, — *proprietor's business*, too! Of course I see it might stand in the way of your making up to the old man afterwards and coming in for a million. Well! you can tell him it's *me*. Say I *would* put it in. Say I'm nasty — and I *am!*"

"Then it must go in?" said John Milton, with a white face.

"You bet."

"Then *I* must go out!" And writing out his resignation, he laid it before his chief and left.

But he could not bear to tell this to his wife when he climbed the hill that night, and he invented some excuse for bringing his work home. The invalid never noticed any change in his usual buoyancy; and indeed I fear, when he was fairly installed with his writing materials at the foot of her bed, he had quite forgotten the episode. He was recalled to it by a faint sigh.

"What is it, dear?" he said, looking up.

"I like to see you writing, Milty. You always look so happy."

"Always so happy, dear?"

"Yes. You are happy, are you not?"

"Always." He got up and kissed her. Nevertheless, when he sat down to his work again, his face was turned a little more to the window.

Another serious incident — to be also kept from the invalid — shortly followed. The article in the "Clarion" had borne its fruit. The third day after his resignation a rival paper sharply retorted. "The cowardly insinuations against the record of a justly honored capitalist," said the "Pioneer," "although quite in keeping with the brazen 'Clarion,' might attract the attentions of the slandered

party, if it were not known to his friends as well as himself that it may be traced almost directly to a cast-off member of his own family, who, it seems, is reduced to haunting the back doors of certain blatant journals to dispose of his cheap wares. The slanderer is secure from public exposure in the superior decency of his relations, who refrain from airing their family linen upon editorial lines."

This was the journal to which John Milton had hopefully turned for work. When he read it there seemed but one thing for him to do — and he did it. Gentle and optimistic as was his nature, he had been brought up in a community where sincere directness of personal offense was followed by equally sincere directness of personal redress, and — he challenged the editor. The bearer of his cartel was one Jack Hamlin, I grieve to say a gambler by profession, but between whom and John Milton had sprung up an odd friendship of which the best that can be said is that it was to each equally and unselfishly unprofitable. The challenge was accepted, the preliminaries arranged. "I suppose," said Jack carelessly, "as the old man ought to do something for your wife in case of accident, you 've made some sort of a will?"

"I 've thought of that," said John Milton dubiously, "but I 'm afraid it 's no use. You see" — he hesitated — "I 'm not of age."

"May I ask how old you are, sonny?" said Jack, with great gravity.

"I 'm almost twenty," said John Milton, coloring.

"It is n't exactly *vingt-et-un*, but I 'd stand on it; if I were you I would n't draw to such a hand," said Jack coolly.

The young husband had arranged to be absent from his home that night, and early morning found him, with Jack, grave, but courageous, in a little hollow behind the Mission Hills. To them presently approached his antagonist,

jauntily accompanied by Colonel Starbottle, his second. They halted, but after the formal salutation were instantly joined by Jack Hamlin. For a few moments John Milton remained awkwardly alone — pending a conversation which even at that supreme moment he felt as being like the general attitude of his friends towards him, in its complete ignoring of himself. The next moment the three men stepped towards him. "We have come, sir," said Colonel Starbottle in his precisest speech but his jauntiest manner, "to offer you a full and ample apology — a personal apology — which only supplements that full public apology that my principal, sir, this gentleman," indicating the editor of the "Pioneer," "has this morning made in the columns of his paper, as you will observe," producing a newspaper. "We have, sir," continued the colonel loftily, "only within the last twelve hours become aware of the — er — *real* circumstances of the case. We would regret that the affair had gone so far already, if it had not given us, sir, the opportunity of testifying to your gallantry. We do so gladly; and if — er — er — a *few years later*, Mr. Harcourt, you should ever need — a friend in any matter of this kind, I am, sir, at your service." John Milton gazed half inquiringly, half uneasily at Jack.

"It 's all right, Milt," he said *sotto voce*. "Shake hands all round and let 's go to breakfast. And I rather think that editor wants to employ you *himself*."

It was true; for when that night he climbed eagerly the steep homeward hill, he carried with him the written offer of an engagement on the "Pioneer." As he entered the door his wife's nurse and companion met him with a serious face. There had been a strange and unexpected change in the patient's condition, and the doctor had already been there twice. As he put aside his coat and hat and entered her room, it seemed to him that he had forever put aside all else of essay and ambition beyond those four walls.

And with the thought a great peace came upon him. It seemed good to him to live for her alone.

It was not for long. As each monotonous day brought the morning mist and evening fog regularly to the little hilltop where his whole being was now centred, she seemed to grow daily weaker, and the little circle of her life narrowed day by day. One morning when the usual mist appeared to have been withheld and the sun had risen with a strange and cruel brightness; when the waves danced and sparkled on the bay below and light glanced from dazzling sails, and even the white tombs on Lone Mountain glittered keenly; when cheery voices hailing each other on the hillside came to him clearly but without sense or meaning; when earth, sky, and sea seemed quivering with life and motion, — he opened the door of that one little house on which the only shadow seemed to have fallen, and went forth again into the world alone.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Daniel Harcourt's town mansion was also on an eminence, but it was that gentler acclivity of fashion known as Rincon Hill, and sunned itself on a southern slope of luxury. It had been described as "princely" and "fairy-like" by a grateful reporter; tourists and travelers had sung its praises in letters to their friends and in private reminiscences, for it had dispensed hospitality to most of the celebrities who had visited the coast. Nevertheless its charm was mainly due to the ruling taste of Miss Clementina Harcourt, who had astonished her father by her marvelous intuition of the nice requirements and elegant responsibilities of their position; and had thrown her mother into the pained perplexity of a matronly hen, who, among the ducks' eggs intrusted to her fostering care, had unwittingly hatched a graceful but discomposing cygnet.

Indeed, after holding out feebly against the siege of wealth at Tasajara and San Francisco, Mrs. Harcourt had abandoned herself hopelessly to the horrors of its invasion; had allowed herself to be dragged from her kitchen by her exultant daughters and set up in black silk in a certain conventional respectability in the drawing-room. Strange to say, her commiserating hospitality, or hospital-like ministration, not only gave her popularity, but a certain kind of distinction. An exaltation so sorrowfully deprecated by its possessor was felt to be a sign of superiority. She was spoken of as "motherly," even by those who vaguely knew that there was somewhere a discarded son struggling in poverty with a helpless wife, and that she had sided with

her husband in disinheriting a daughter who had married unwisely. She was sentimentally spoken of as a "true wife," while never opposing a single meanness of her husband, suggesting a single active virtue, nor questioning her right to sacrifice herself and her family for his sake. With nothing she cared to affect, she was quite free from affectation; and even the critical Lawrence Grant was struck with the dignity which her narrow simplicity, that had seemed small even in Sidon, attained in her palatial hall in San Francisco. It appeared to be a perfectly logical conclusion that when such unaffectedness and simplicity were forced to assume a hostile attitude to anybody, the latter must be to blame.

Since the festival of Tasajara Mr. Grant had been a frequent visitor at Harcourt's, and was a guest on the eve of his departure from San Francisco. The distinguished position of each made their relations appear quite natural without inciting gossip as to any attraction in Harcourt's daughters. It was late one afternoon as he was passing the door of Harcourt's study that his host called him in. He found him sitting at his desk with some papers before him and a folded copy of the "Clarion." With his back to the fading light of the window his face was partly in shadow.

"By the way, Grant," he began, with an assumption of carelessness somewhat inconsistent with the fact that he had just called him in, "it may be necessary for me to pull up those fellows who are blackguarding me in the 'Clarion.'"

"Why, they have n't been saying anything new?" asked Grant laughingly, as he glanced towards the paper.

"No — that is — only a rehash of what they said before," returned Harcourt, without opening the paper.

"Well," said Grant playfully, "you don't mind their saying that you 're *not* the original pioneer of Tasajara, for

it 's true; nor that that fellow 'Lige Curtis disappeared suddenly, for he did, if I remember rightly. But there 's nothing in that to invalidate your rights to Tasajara, to say nothing of your five years' undisputed possession."

"Of course there 's no *legal* question," said Harcourt almost sharply. "But as a matter of absurd report, I may want to contradict their insinuations. And *you* remember all the circumstances, don't you?"

"I should think so! Why, my dear fellow, I 've told it everywhere! — here, in New York, Newport, and in London; by Jove, it 's one of my best stories! How a company sent me out with a surveyor to look up a railroad and agricultural possibilities in the wilderness; how just as I found them — and a rather big thing they made, too — I was set afloat by a flood and a raft, and drifted ashore on your bank, and practically demonstrated to you what you did n't know and did n't dare to hope for — that there could be a waterway straight to Sidon from the embarcadero. I 've told what a charming evening we had with you and your daughters in the old house, and how I returned your hospitality by giving you a tip about the railroad; and how you slipped out while we were playing cards, to clinch the bargain for the land with that drunken fellow, 'Lige Curtis" —

"What 's that?" interrupted Harcourt quickly.

It was well that the shadow hid from Grant the expression of Harcourt's face, or his reply might have been sharper. As it was, he answered a little stiffly: —

"I beg your pardon" —

Harcourt recovered himself. "You 're all wrong!" he said; "that bargain was made long *before*. I never saw 'Lige Curtis after you came to the house. It was before that, in the afternoon," he went on hurriedly, "that he was last in my store. I can prove it." Nevertheless he was so shocked and indignant at being confronted in his

own suppressions and falsehoods by an even greater and more astounding misconception of fact, that for a moment he felt helpless. What, he reflected, if it were alleged that 'Lige had returned again after the loafers had gone, or had never left the store as had been said? Nonsense! There was John Milton, who had been there reading all the time, and who could disprove it. Yes, but John Milton was his discarded son, — his enemy, — perhaps even his very slanderer!

"But," said Grant quietly, "don't you remember that your daughter Euphemia said something that evening about the land 'Lige had *offered* you, and you snapped up the young lady rather sharply for letting out secrets, and *then* you went out? At least that 's my impression."

It was, however, more than an impression; with Grant's scientific memory for characteristic details he had noticed that particular circumstance as part of the social phenomena.

"I don't know what Phemie *said*," returned Harcourt impatiently. "I *know* there was no offer pending; the land had been sold to me before I ever saw you. Why — you must have thought me up to pretty sharp practice with Curtis — eh?" he added, with a forced laugh.

Grant smiled; he had been accustomed to hear of such sharp practice among his business acquaintance, although he himself by nature and profession was incapable of it, but he had not deemed Harcourt more scrupulous than others. "Perhaps so," he said lightly; "but for Heaven's sake don't ask me to spoil my reputation as a *raconteur* for the sake of a mere fact or two. I assure you it 's a mighty taking story as *I* tell it — and it don't hurt you in a business way. You 're the hero of it — hang it all!"

"Yes," said Harcourt, without noticing Grant's half-cynical superiority, "but you 'll oblige me if you won't tell it again *in that way*. There are men here mean enough to make the worst of it. It 's nothing to me, of course,

but my family — the girls, you know — are rather sensitive."

"I had no idea they even knew it, — much less cared for it," said Grant, with sudden seriousness. "I dare say if those fellows in the 'Clarion' knew that they were annoying the ladies they 'd drop it. Who 's the editor? Look here — leave it to me; I 'll look into it. Better that you should n't appear in the matter at all."

"You understand that if it was a really serious matter, Grant," said Harcourt, with a slight attitude, "I should n't allow any one to take my place."

"My dear fellow, there 'll be nobody 'called out' and no 'shooting at sight,' whatever is the result of my interference," returned Grant lightly. "It 'll be all right." He was quite aware of the power of his own independent position and the fact that he had been often appealed to before in delicate arbitration.

Harcourt was equally conscious of this, but by a strange inconsistency now felt relieved at the coolness with which Grant had accepted the misconception which had at first seemed so dangerous. If he were ready to condone what he thought was *sharp practice*, he could not be less lenient with the real facts that might come out, — of course always excepting that interpolated consideration in the bill of sale, which, however, no one but the missing Curtis could ever discover. The fact that a man of Grant's secure position had interested himself in this matter would secure him from the working of that personal vulgar jealousy which his humbler antecedents had provoked. And if, as he fancied, Grant really cared for Clementina —

"As you like," he said, with half-affected lightness; "and now let us talk of something else. Clementina has been thinking of getting up a riding party to San Mateo for Mrs. Ashwood. We must show them some civility, and that Boston brother of hers, Mr. Shipley, will have to

be invited also. I can't get away, and my wife, of course, will only be able to join them at San Mateo in the carriage. I reckon it would be easier for Clementina if you took my place, and helped her look after the riding party. It will need a man, and I think she 'd prefer you — as you know she 's rather particular — unless, of course, you 'd be wanted for Mrs. Ashwood or Phemie, or somebody else."

From his shadowed corner he could see that a pleasant light had sprung into Grant's eyes, although his reply was in his ordinary easy banter. "I shall be only too glad to act as Miss Clementina's vaquero, and lasso her runaways, or keep stragglers in the road."

There seemed to be small necessity, however, for this active coöperation; for when the cheerful cavalcade started from the house a few mornings later, Mr. Lawrence Grant's onerous duties seemed to be simply confined to those of an ordinary cavalier at the side of Miss Clementina, a few paces in the rear of the party. But this safe distance gave them the opportunity of conversing without being overheard, — an apparently discreet precaution.

"Your father was so exceedingly affable to me the other day that if I had n't given you my promise to say nothing, I think I would have fallen on my knees to him then and there, revealed my feelings, asked for your hand and his blessing — or whatever one does at such a time. But how long do you intend to keep me in this suspense?"

Clementina turned her clear eyes half abstractedly upon him, as if imperfectly recalling some forgotten situation. "You forget," she said, "that part of your promise was that you would n't even speak of it to me again without my permission."

"But my time is so short now. Give me some definite hope before I go. Let me believe that when we meet in New York" —

"You will find me just the same as now! Yes, I think

I can promise *that*. Let that suffice. You said the other day you liked me because I had not changed for five years. You can surely trust that I will not alter in as many months."

"If I only knew" —

"Ah, if *I* only knew, — if *we all* only knew. But we don't. Come, Mr. Grant, let it rest as it is. Unless you want to go still further back and have it as it *was*, at Sidon. There I think you fancied Euphemia most."

"Clementina!"

"That is my name, and those people ahead of us know it already."

"You are called *Clementina*, — but you are not merciful!"

"You are very wrong, for you might see that Mr. Shipley has twice checked his horse that he might hear what you are saying, and Phemie is always showing Mrs. Ashwood something in the landscape behind us."

All this was the more hopeless and exasperating to Grant since in the young girl's speech and manner there was not the slightest trace of coquetry or playfulness. He could not help saying a little bitterly, "I don't think that any one would imagine from your manner that you were receiving a declaration."

"But they might imagine from yours that you had the right to quarrel with me, — which would be worse."

"We cannot part like this! It is too cruel to me."

"We cannot part otherwise without the risk of greater cruelty."

"But say at least, Clementina, that I have no rival. There is no other more favored suitor?"

"That is so like a man — and yet so unlike the proud one I believed you to be. Why should a man like you even consider such a possibility? If I were a man I know *I* could n't." She turned upon him a glance so clear and

untroubled by either conscious vanity or evasion that he was hopelessly convinced of the truth of her statement, and she went on in a slightly lowered tone: "You have no right to ask me such a question, — but perhaps for that reason I am willing to answer you. There is none. Hush! For a good rider you are setting a poor example to the others, by crowding me towards the bank. Go forward and talk to Phemie, and tell her not to worry Mrs. Ashwood's horse nor race with her; I don't think he 's quite safe, and Mrs. Ashwood is n't accustomed to using the Spanish bit. I suppose I must say something to Mr. Shipley, who does n't seem to understand that *I* 'm acting as chaperon, and *you* as captain of the party."

She cantered forward as she spoke, and Grant was obliged to join her sister, who, mounted on a powerful roan, was mischievously exciting a beautiful quaker-colored mustang ridden by Mrs. Ashwood, already irritated by the unfamiliar pressure of the Eastern woman's hand upon his bit. The thick dust which had forced the party of twenty to close up in two solid files across the road compelled them at the first opening in the roadside fence to take the field in a straggling gallop. Grant, eager to escape from his own discontented self by doing something for others, reined in beside Euphemia and the fair stranger.

"Let me take your place until Mrs. Ashwood's horse is quieted," he half whispered to Euphemia.

"Thank you, — and I suppose it does not make any matter to Clem who quiets mine," she said, with provoking eyes and a toss of her head worthy of the spirited animal she was riding.

"She thinks you quite capable of managing yourself and even others," he replied, with a playful glance at Shipley, who was riding somewhat stiffly on the other side.

"Don't be too sure," retorted Phemie, with another dangerous look; "I may give you trouble yet."

They were approaching the first undulation of the russet plain they had emerged upon, — an umbrageous slope that seemed suddenly to diverge in two defiles among the shaded hills. Grant had given a few words of practical advice to Mrs. Ashwood, and shown her how to guide her mustang by the merest caressing touch of the rein upon its sensitive neck. He had not been sympathetically inclined towards the fair stranger, a rich and still youthful widow, although he could not deny her unquestioned good breeding, mental refinement, and a certain languorous thoughtfulness that was almost melancholy, which accented her blonde delicacy. But he had noticed that her manner was politely reserved and slightly constrained towards the Harcourts, and he had already resented it with a lover's instinctive loyalty. He had at first attributed it to a want of sympathy between Mrs. Ashwood's more intellectual sentimentalities and the Harcourts' undeniable lack of any sentiment whatever. But there was evidently some other innate antagonism. He was very polite to Mrs. Ashwood; she responded with a gentlewoman's courtesy, and, he was forced to admit, even a broader comprehension of his own merits than the Harcourt girls had ever shown, but he could still detect that she was not in accord with the party.

"I am afraid you do not like California, Mrs. Ashwood?" he said pleasantly. "You perhaps find the life here too unrestrained and unconventional?"

She looked at him in quick astonishment. "Are you quite sincere? Why, it strikes me that this is just what it is *not*. And I have so longed for something quite different. From what I have been told about the originality and adventure of everything here, and your independence of old social forms and customs, I am afraid I expected the opposite of what I 've seen. Why, this very party — except that the ladies are prettier and more expensively gotten up — is like any party that might have ridden out at Saratoga or New York."

"And as stupid, you would say."

"As *conventional*, Mr. Grant; always excepting this lovely creature beneath me, whom I can't make out and who does n't seem to care that I should. There! look! I told you so!"

Her mustang had suddenly bounded forward; but as Grant followed he could see that the cause was the example of Phemie, who had, in some mad freak, dashed out in a frantic gallop. A half-dozen of the younger people hilariously accepted the challenge; the excitement was communicated to the others, until the whole cavalcade was sweeping down the slope. Grant was still at Mrs. Ashwood's side, restraining her mustang and his own impatient horse when Clementina joined them. "Phemie's mare has really bolted, I fear," she said in a quick whisper; "ride on, and never mind us." Grant looked quickly ahead; Phemie's roan, excited by the shouts behind her and to all appearance ungovernable, was fast disappearing with her rider. Without a word, trusting to his own good horsemanship and better knowledge of the ground, he darted out of the cavalcade to overtake her.

But the unfortunate result of this was to give further impulse to the now racing horses as they approached a point where the slope terminated in two diverging cañons. Mrs. Ashwood gave a sharp pull upon her bit. To her consternation the mustang stopped short almost instantly, — planting his two fore feet rigidly in the dust and even sliding forward with the impetus. Had her seat been less firm she might have been thrown; but she recovered herself, although in doing so she still bore upon the bit, when, to her astonishment, the mustang deliberately stiffened himself as if for a shock, and then began to back slowly, quivering with excitement. She did not know that her native-bred animal fondly believed that he was participating in a rodeo, and that to his equine intelligence his fair mistress had

just lassoed something! In vain she urged him forward; he still waited for the shock! When the cloud of dust in which she had been enwrapped drifted away, she saw, to her amazement, that she was alone. The entire party had disappeared into one of the cañons, — but which one she could not tell!

When she succeeded at last in urging her mustang forward again, she determined to take the right-hand cañon and trust to being either met or overtaken. A more practical and less adventurous nature would have waited at the point of divergence for the return of some of the party, but Mrs. Ashwood was, in truth, not sorry to be left to herself and the novel scenery for a while, and she had no doubt but she would eventually find her way to the hotel at San Mateo, which could not be far away, in time for luncheon.

The road was still well defined, although it presently began to wind between ascending ranks of pines and larches that marked the terraces of hills, so high that she wondered she had not noticed them from the plains. An unmistakable suggestion of some haunting primeval solitude, a sense of the hushed and mysterious proximity of a nature she had never known before, the strange half-intoxicating breath of unsunned foliage and untrodden grasses and herbs, all combined to exalt her as she cantered forward. Even her horse seemed to have acquired an intelligent liberty, or rather to have established a sympathy with her in his needs and her own longings; instinctively she no longer pulled him with the curb; the reins hung loosely on his self-arched and unfettered neck; secure in this loneliness she found herself even talking to him with barbaric freedom. As she went on, the vague hush of all things animate and inanimate around her seemed to thicken, until she unconsciously halted before a dim and pillared wood, and a vast and heathless opening on whose mute brown lips Nature

seemed to have laid the finger of silence. She forgot the party she had left, she forgot the luncheon she was going to; more important still she forgot that she had already left the traveled track far behind her, and, tremulous with anticipation, rode timidly into that arch of shadow.

As her horse's hoofs fell noiselessly on the elastic moss-carpeted aisle she forgot even more than that. She forgot the artificial stimulus and excitement of the life she had been leading so long; she forgot the small meannesses and smaller worries of her well-to-do experiences; she forgot herself, — rather she regained a self she had long forgotten. For in the sweet seclusion of this half-darkened sanctuary the clinging fripperies of her past slipped from her as a tawdry garment. The petted, spoiled, and vapidly precocious girlhood which had merged into a womanhood of aimless triumphs and meaner ambitions; the worldly but miserable triumph of a marriage that had left her delicacy abused and her heart sick and unsatisfied; the wifehood without home, seclusion, or maternity; the widowhood that at last brought relief, but with it the consciousness of hopelessly wasted youth, — all this seemed to drop from her here as lightly as the winged needles or noiseless withered spray from the dim gray vault above her head. In the sovereign balm of that woodland breath her better spirit was restored; somewhere in these wholesome shades seemed to still lurk what should have been her innocent and nymph-like youth, and to come out once more and greet her. Old songs she had forgotten, or whose music had failed in the discords of her frivolous life, sang themselves to her again in that sweet, grave silence; girlish dreams that she had foolishly been ashamed of, or had put away with her childish toys, stole back to her once more and became real in this tender twilight; old fancies, old fragments of verse and childish lore, grew palpable and moved faintly before her. The boyish prince who should have

come was there; the babe that should have been hers was there! — she stopped suddenly with flaming eyes and indignant color. For it appeared that a *man* was there too, and had just risen from the fallen tree where he had been sitting.

CHAPTER VIII

She had so far forgotten herself in yielding to the spell of the place, and in the revelation of her naked soul and inner nature, that it was with something of the instinct of outraged modesty that she seemed to shrink before this apparition of the outer world and outer worldliness. In an instant the nearer past returned; she remembered where she was, how she had come there, from whom she had come, and to whom she was returning. She could see that she had not only aimlessly wandered from the world but from the road; and for that instant she hated this man who had reminded her of it, even while she knew she must ask his assistance. It relieved her slightly to observe that he seemed as disturbed and impatient as herself, and as he took a pencil from between his lips and returned it to his pocket he scarcely looked at her.

But with her return to the world of *convenances* came its repression, and with a gentlewoman's ease and modulated voice she leaned over her mustang's neck and said, "I have strayed from my party and am afraid I have lost my way. We were going to the hotel at San Mateo. Would you be kind enough to direct me there, or show me how I can regain the road by which I came?"

Her voice and manner were quite enough to arrest him where he stood with a pleased surprise in his fresh and ingenuous face. She looked at him more closely. He was, in spite of his long silken mustache, so absurdly young; he might, in spite of that youth, be so absurdly manlike! What was he doing there? Was he a farmer's son, an

artist, a surveyor, or a city clerk out for a holiday? Was there perhaps a youthful female of his species somewhere for whom he was waiting and upon whose tryst she was now breaking? Was he — terrible thought! — the outlying picket of some family picnic? His dress, neat, simple, free from ostentatious ornament, betrayed nothing. She waited for his voice.

"Oh, you have left San Mateo miles away to the right," he said, with quick youthful sympathy, "at least five miles! Where did you leave your party?"

His voice was winning, and even refined, she thought. She answered it quite spontaneously, "At a fork of two roads. I see now I took the wrong turning."

"Yes, you took the road to Crystal Spring. It 's just down there in the valley, not more than a mile. You 'd have been there now if you had n't turned off at the woods."

"I could n't help it, it was so beautiful."

"Is n't it?"

"Perfect."

"And such shadows, and such intensity of color."

"Wonderful! — and all along the ridge, looking down that defile!"

"Yes, and that point where it seems as if you had only to stretch out your hand to pick a manzanita berry from the other side of the cañon, half a mile across!"

"Yes, and that first glimpse of the valley through the Gothic gateway of rocks!"

"And the color of those rocks, — cinnamon and bronze with the light green of the yerba buena vine splashing over them."

"Yes, but for color *did* you notice that hillside of yellow poppies pouring down into the valley like a golden Niagara?"

"Certainly, — and the perfect clearness of everything."

"And yet such complete silence and repose!"

"Oh yes!"

"Ah, yes!"

They were both gravely nodding and shaking their heads with sparkling eyes and brightened color, looking not at each other but at the far landscape vignetted through a lozenge-shaped wind opening in the trees. Suddenly Mrs. Ashwood straightened herself in the saddle, looked grave, lifted the reins and apparently the ten years with them that had dropped from her. But she said in her easiest well-bred tones, and a half sigh, "Then I must take the road back again to where it forks?"

"Oh no! you can go by Crystal Spring. It 's no further, and I 'll show you the way. But you 'd better stop and rest yourself and your horse for a little while at the Springs Hotel. It 's a very nice place. Many people ride there from San Francisco to luncheon and return. I wonder that your party did n't prefer it; and if they are looking for you, — as they surely must be," he said, as if with a sudden conception of her importance, "they 'll come there when they find you 're not at San Mateo."

This seemed reasonable, although the process of being "fetched" and taking the five miles ride, which she had enjoyed so much alone, in company was not attractive. "Could n't I go on at once?" she said impulsively.

"You would meet them sooner," he said thoughtfully.

This was quite enough for Mrs. Ashwood. "I think I 'll rest this poor horse, who is really tired," she said, with charming hypocrisy, "and stop at the hotel."

She saw his face brighten. Perhaps he was the son of the hotel proprietor, or a youthful partner himself. "I suppose you live here?" she suggested gently. "You seem to know the place so well."

"No," he returned quickly; "I only run down here from San Francisco when I can get a day off."

A day off! He was in some regular employment. But

he continued, "And I used to go to boarding-school near here, and know all these woods well."

He must be a native! How odd! She had not conceived that there might be any other population here than the immigrants; perhaps that was what made him so interesting and different from the others. "Then your father and mother live here?" she said.

His frank face, incapable of disguise, changed suddenly. "No," he said simply, but without any trace of awkwardness. Then after a slight pause he laid his hand — she noticed it was white and well kept — on her mustang's neck, and said, "If — if you care to trust yourself to me, I could lead you and your horse down a trail into the valley that is at least a third of the distance shorter. It would save you going back to the regular road, and there are one or two lovely views that I could show you. I should be so pleased, if it would not trouble you. There 's a steep place or two — but I think there 's no danger."

"I shall not be afraid."

She smiled so graciously, and, as she fully believed, maternally, that he looked at her the second time. To his first hurried impression of her as an elegant and delicately nurtured woman — one of the class of distinguished tourists that fashion was beginning to send thither — he had now to add that she had a quantity of fine silken-spun light hair gathered in a heavy braid beneath her gray hat; that her mouth was very delicately lipped and beautifully sensitive; that her soft skin, although just then touched with excitement, was a pale faded velvet, and seemed to be worn with ennui rather than experience; that her eyes were hidden behind a strip of gray veil whence only a faint glow was discernible. To this must still be added a poetic fancy all his own that, as she sat there, with the skirt of her gray habit falling from her long bodiced waist over the mustang's fawn-colored flanks, and with her slim gauntleted

hands lightly swaying the reins, she looked like Queen Guinevere in the forest. Not that he particularly fancied Queen Guinevere, or that he at all imagined himself Launcelot, but it was quite in keeping with the suggestion-haunted brain of John Milton Harcourt, whom the astute reader has of course long since recognized.

Preceding her through the soft carpeted vault with a woodman's instinct, — for there was apparently no trail to be seen, — the soft inner twilight began to give way to the outer stronger day, and presently she was startled to see the clear blue of the sky before her on apparently the same level as the brown pine-tessellated floor she was treading. Not only did this show her that she was crossing a ridge of the upland, but a few moments later she had passed beyond the woods to a golden hillside that sloped towards a leafy, sheltered, and exquisitely proportioned valley. A tiny but picturesque tower, and a few straggling roofs and gables, the flashing of a crystal stream through the leaves, and a narrow white ribbon of road winding behind it indicated the hostelry they were seeking. So peaceful and unfrequented it looked, nestling between the hills, that it seemed as if they had discovered it.

With his hand at times upon the bridle, at others merely caressing her mustang's neck, he led the way; there were a few breathless places where the crown of his straw hat appeared between her horse's reins, and again when she seemed almost slipping over on his shoulder, but they were passed with such frank fearlessness and invincible youthful confidence on the part of her escort that she felt no timidity. There were moments when a bit of the charmed landscape unfolding before them overpowered them both, and they halted to gaze, — sometimes without a word, or only a significant gesture of sympathy and attention. At one of those artistic manifestations Mrs. Ashwood laid her slim gloved fingers lightly but unwittingly on John Milton's

arm, and withdrew them, however, with a quick girlish apology and a foolish color which annoyed her more than the appearance of familiarity. But they were now getting well down into the valley; the court of the little hotel was already opening before them; their unconventional relations in the idyllic world above had changed; the new one required some delicacy of handling, and she had an idea that even the simplicity of the young stranger might be confusing.

"I must ask you to continue to act as my escort," she said laughingly. "I am Mrs. Ashwood, of Philadelphia, visiting San Francisco with my sister and brother, who are, I am afraid, even now hopelessly waiting luncheon for me at San Mateo. But as there seems to be no prospect of my joining them in time, I hope you will be able to give me the pleasure of your company, with whatever they may give us here in the way of refreshment."

"I shall be very happy," returned John Milton, with unmistakable candor; "but perhaps some of your friends will be arriving in quest of you, if they are not already here."

"Then they will join us or wait," said Mrs. Ashwood incisively, with her first exhibition of the imperiousness of a rich and pretty woman. Perhaps she was a little annoyed that her elaborate introduction of herself had produced no reciprocal disclosure by her companion. "Will you please send the landlord to me?" she added.

John Milton disappeared in the hotel as she cantered to the porch. In another moment she was giving the landlord her orders with the easy confidence of one who knew herself only as an always welcome and highly privileged guest, which was not without its effect. "And," she added carelessly, "when everything is ready you will please tell — Mr." —

"Harcourt," suggested the landlord promptly.

E BOYD SMITH

Mrs. Ashwood's perfectly trained face gave not the slightest sign of the surprise that had overtaken her. "Of course, — Mr. Harcourt."

"You know he 's the son of the millionaire," continued the landlord, not at all unwilling to display the importance of the *habitués* of Crystal Spring, "though they 've quarreled and don't get on together."

"I know," said the lady languidly, "and, if any one comes here for *me*, ask them to wait in the parlor until I come."

Then, submitting herself and her dusty habit to the awkward ministration of the Irish chambermaid, she was quite thrilled with a delightful curiosity. She vaguely remembered that she had heard something of the Harcourt family discord, — but that was the divorced daughter surely! And this young man was Harcourt's son, and they had quarreled! A quarrel with a frank, open, ingenuous fellow like that — a mere boy — could only be the father's fault. Luckily she had never mentioned the name of Harcourt! She would not now; he need not know that it was his father who had originated the party; why should she make him uncomfortable for the few moments they were together?

There was nothing of this in her face as she descended and joined him. He thought that face handsome, well-bred, and refined. But this breeding and refinement seemed to him — in his ignorance of the world, possibly — as only a graceful concealment of a self of which he knew nothing; and he was not surprised to find that her pretty gray eyes, now no longer hidden by her veil, really told him no more than her lips. He was a little afraid of her, and now that she had lost her naïve enthusiasm he was conscious of a vague remorsefulness for his interrupted work in the forest. What was he doing here? He who had avoided the cruel, selfish world of wealth and pleasure, — a world that this

woman represented, — the world that had stood apart from him in the one dream of his life — and had let Loo die! His quickly responsive face darkened.

"I am afraid I really interrupted you up there," she said gently, looking in his face with an expression of unfeigned concern; "you were at work of some kind, I know, and I have very selfishly thought only of myself. But the whole scene was so new to me, and I so rarely meet any one who sees things as I do, that I know you will forgive me." She bent her eyes upon him with a certain soft timidity. "You are an artist?"

"I am afraid not," he said, coloring and smiling faintly; "I don't think I could draw a straight line."

"Don't try to; they 're not pretty, and the mere ability to draw them straight or curved does n't make an artist. But you are a *lover* of nature, I know, and from what I have heard you say I believe you can do what lovers cannot do, — make others feel as they do, — and that is what I call being an artist. You write? You are a poet?"

"Oh dear, no," he said, with a smile, half of relief and half of naïve superiority, "I 'm a prose writer — on a daily newspaper."

To his surprise she was not disconcerted; rather a look of animation lit up her face as she said brightly, "Oh, then, you can of course satisfy my curiosity about something. You know the road from San Francisco to the Cliff House. Except for the view of the sea-lions when one gets there it 's stupid; my brother says it 's like all the San Francisco excursions, — a dusty drive with a julep at the end of it. Well, one day we were coming back from a drive there, and when we were beginning to wind along the brow of that dreadful staring Lone Mountain Cemetery, I said I would get out and walk, and avoid the obtrusive glitter of those tombstones rising before me all the way. I pushed open a little gate and passed in. Once among these

funereal shrubs and cold statuesque lilies everything was changed; I saw the staring tombstones no longer, for, like them, I seemed to be always facing the sea. The road had vanished; everything had vanished but the endless waste of ocean below me, and the last slope of rock and sand. It seemed to be the fittest place for a cemetery, — this end of the crumbling earth, — this beginning of the eternal sea. There! don't think that idea my own, or that I thought of it then. No, — I read it all afterwards, and that 's why I 'm telling you this."

She could not help smiling at his now attentive face, and went on: "Some days afterwards I got hold of a newspaper four or six months old, and there was a description of all that I thought I had seen and felt, — only far more beautiful and touching, as you shall see, for I cut it out of the paper and have kept it. It seemed to me that it must be some personal experience, — as if the writer had followed some dear friend there, — although it was with the unostentation and indefiniteness of true and delicate feeling. It impressed me so much that I went back there twice or thrice, and always seemed to move to the rhythm of that beautiful funeral march — and I am afraid, being a woman, that I wandered around among the graves as though I could find out who it was that had been sung so sweetly, and if it were man or woman. I 've got it here," she said, taking a dainty ivory porte-monnaie from her pocket and picking out with two slim finger-tips a folded slip of newspaper; "and I thought that maybe you might recognize the style of the writer, and perhaps know something of his history. For I believe he has one. There! that is only a part of the article, of course, but it is the part that interested me. Just read from there," she pointed, leaning partly over his shoulder so that her soft breath stirred his hair, "to the end; it is n't long."

In the film that seemed to come across his eyes, suddenly

the print appeared blurred and indistinct. But he knew that she had put into his hand something he had written after the death of his wife; something spontaneous and impulsive, when her loss still filled his days and nights and almost unconsciously swayed his pen. He remembered that his eyes had been as dim when he wrote it — and now — handed to him by this smiling, well-to-do woman, he was as shocked at first as if he had suddenly found her reading his private letters. This was followed by a sudden sense of shame that he had ever thus publicly bared his feelings, and then by the illogical but irresistible conviction that it was false and stupid. The few phrases she had pointed out appeared as cheap and hollow rhetoric amid the surroundings of their social *tête-à-tête* over the luncheon-table. There was small danger that this heady wine of woman's praise would make him betray himself; there was no sign of gratified authorship in his voice as he quietly laid down the paper and said dryly, "I am afraid I can't help you. You know it may be purely fanciful."

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Ashwood thoughtfully. "At the same time it does n't strike me as a very abiding grief for that very reason. It 's *too* sympathetic. It strikes me that it might be the first grief of some one too young to be inured to sorrow or experienced enough to accept it as the common lot. But like all youthful impressions it is very sincere and true while it lasts. I don't know whether one gets anything more real when one gets older."

With an insincerity he could not account for, he now felt inclined to defend his previous sentiment, although all the while conscious of a certain charm in his companion's graceful skepticism. He had in his truthfulness and independence hitherto always been quite free from that feeble admiration of cynicism which attacks the intellectually weak and immature, and his present predilection may have been due more to her charming personality. She was not at

all like his sisters; she had none of Clementina's cold abstraction, and none of Euphemia's sharp and demonstrative effusiveness. And in his secret consciousness of her flattering foreknowledge of him, with her assurance that before they had ever met he had unwittingly influenced her, he began to feel more at his ease. His fair companion also, in the equally secret knowledge she had acquired of his history, felt as secure as if she had been formally introduced. Nobody could find fault with her for showing civility to the ostensible son of her host; it was not necessary that she should be aware of their family differences. There was a charm, too, in their enforced isolation, in what was the exceptional solitude of the little hotel that day, and the seclusion of their table by the window of the dining-room, which gave a charming domesticity to their repast. From time to time they glanced down the lonely cañon, losing itself in the afternoon shadow. Nevertheless Mrs. Ashwood's preoccupation with Nature did not preclude a human curiosity to hear something more of John Milton's quarrel with his father. There was certainly nothing of the prodigal son about him; there was no precocious evil knowledge in his frank eyes; no record of excesses in his healthy, fresh complexion; no unwholesome or disturbed tastes in what she had seen of his rural preferences and understanding of natural beauty. To have attempted any direct questioning that would have revealed his name and identity would have obliged her to speak of herself as his father's guest. She began indirectly; he had said he had been a reporter, and he was still a chronicler of this strange life. He had of course heard of many cases of family feuds and estrangements? Her brother had told her of some dreadful vendettas he had known in the Southwest, and how whole families had been divided. Since she had been here she had heard of odd cases of brothers meeting accidentally after long and unaccounted separations; of hus-

bands suddenly confronted with wives they had deserted; of fathers encountering discarded sons!

John Milton's face betrayed no uneasy consciousness. If anything it was beginning to glow with a boyish admiration of the grace and intelligence of the fair speaker, that was perhaps heightened by an assumption of half-coquettish discomfiture.

"You are laughing at me!" she said finally. "But inhuman and selfish as these stories may seem, and sometimes are, I believe that these curious estrangements and separations often come from some fatal weakness of temperament that might be strengthened, or some trivial misunderstanding that could be explained. It is separation that makes them seem irrevocable only because they are inexplicable, and a vague memory always seems more terrible than a definite one. Facts may be forgiven and forgotten, but mysteries haunt one always. I believe there are weak, sensitive people who dread to put their wrongs into shape; those are the kind who sulk, and when you add separation to sulking, reconciliation becomes impossible. I knew a very singular case of that kind once. If you like, I 'll tell it to you. Maybe you will be able, some day, to weave it into one of your writings. And it 's quite true."

It is hardly necessary to say that John Milton had not been touched by any personal significance in his companion's speech, whatever she may have intended; and it is equally true that whether she had presently forgotten her purpose, or had become suddenly interested in her own conversation, her face grew more animated, her manner more confidential, and something of the youthful enthusiasm she had shown in the mountain seemed to come back to her.

"I might say it happened anywhere and call the people M. or N., but it really did occur in my own family, and although I was much younger at the time it impressed me

very strongly. My cousin, who had been my playmate, was an orphan, and had been intrusted to the care of my father, who was his guardian. He was always a clever boy, but singularly sensitive and quick to take offense. Perhaps it was because the little property his father had left made him partly dependent on my father, and that I was rich, but he seemed to feel the disparity in our positions. I was too young to understand it; I think it existed only in his imagination, for I believe we were treated alike. But I remember that he was full of vague threats of running away and going to sea, and that it was part of his weak temperament to terrify me with his extravagant confidences. I was always frightened when, after one of those scenes, he would pack his valise or perhaps only tie up a few things in a handkerchief, as in the advertisement pictures of the runaway slaves, and declare that we would never lay eyes upon him again. At first I never saw the ridiculousness of all this, — for I ought to have told you that he was a rather delicate and timid boy, and quite unfitted for a rough life or any exposure, — but others did, and one day I laughed at him and told him he was afraid. I shall never forget the expression of his face and never forgive myself for it. He went away, — but he returned the next day! He threatened once to commit suicide, left his clothes on the bank of the river, and came home in another suit of clothes he had taken with him. When I was sent abroad to school I lost sight of him; when I returned he was at college, apparently unchanged. When he came home for vacation, far from having been subdued by contact with strangers, it seemed that his unhappy sensitiveness had been only intensified by the ridicule of his fellows. He had even acquired a most ridiculous theory about the degrading effects of civilization, and wanted to go back to a state of barbarism. He said the wilderness was the only true home of man. My father, instead of bearing with

what I believe was his infirmity, dryly offered him the means to try his experiment. He started for some place in Texas, saying we would never hear from him again. A month after he wrote for more money. My father replied rather impatiently, I suppose, — I never knew exactly what he wrote. That was some years ago. He had told the truth at last, for we never heard from him again."

It is to be feared that John Milton was following the animated lips and eyes of the fair speaker rather than her story. Perhaps that was the reason why he said, "May he not have been a disappointed man?"

"I don't understand," she said simply.

"Perhaps," said John Milton, with a boyish blush, "you may have unconsciously raised hopes in his heart — and" —

"I should hardly attempt to interest a chronicler of adventure like you in such a very commonplace, every-day style of romance," she said, with a little impatience, "even if my vanity compelled me to make such confidences to a stranger. No, — it was nothing quite as vulgar as that. And," she added quickly, with a playfully amused smile as she saw the young fellow's evident distress, "I should have probably heard from him again. Those stories always end in that way."

"And you think" — said John Milton.

"I think," said Mrs. Ashwood slowly, "that he actually did commit suicide — or effaced himself in some way, just as firmly as I believe he might have been saved by judicious treatment. Otherwise we should have heard from him. You 'll say that 's only a woman's reasoning — but I think our perceptions are often instinctive, and I knew his character."

Still following the play of her delicate features into a romance of his own weaving, the imaginative young reporter who had seen so much from the heights of Russian Hill

said earnestly, "Then I have your permission to use this material at any future time?"

"Yes," said the lady smilingly.

"And you will not mind if I should take some liberties with the text?"

"I must of course leave something to your artistic taste. But you will let me see it?"

There were voices outside now, breaking the silence of the veranda. They had been so preoccupied as not to notice the arrival of a horseman. Steps came along the passage; the landlord returned. Mrs. Ashwood turned quickly towards him.

"Mr. Grant, of your party, ma'am, to fetch you."

She saw an unmistakable change in her young friend's mobile face. "I will be ready in a moment," she said to the landlord. Then, turning to John Milton, the arch-hypocrite said sweetly, "My brother must have known instinctively that I was in good hands, as he did n't come. But I am sorry, for I should have so liked to introduce him to you — although by the way," with a bright smile, "I don't think you have yet told me your name. I know I could n't have *forgotten* it."

"Harcourt," said John Milton, with a half-embarrassed laugh.

"But you must come and see me, Mr. — Mr. Harcourt," she said, producing a card from a case already in her fingers, "at my hotel, and let my brother thank you there for your kindness and gallantry to a stranger. I shall be here a few weeks longer before we go south to look for a place where my brother can winter. *Do* come and see me, although *I* cannot introduce you to anything as real and beautiful as what *you* have shown me to-day. Good-by, Mr. Harcourt; I won't trouble you to come down and bore yourself with my escort's questions and congratulations."

She bent her head and allowed her soft eyes to rest upon

his with a graciousness that was beyond her speech, pulled her veil over her eyes again, with a pretty suggestion that she had no further use for them, and taking her riding-skirt lightly in her hand, seemed to glide from the room.

On her way to San Mateo, where it appeared the disorganized party had prolonged their visit to accept an invitation to dine with a local magnate, she was pleasantly conversational with the slightly abstracted Grant. She was so sorry to have given them all this trouble and anxiety! Of course she ought to have waited at the fork of the road, but she had never doubted but she could rejoin them presently on the main road. She was glad that Miss Euphemia's runaway horse had been stopped without accident; it would have been dreadful if anything had happened to *her;* Mr. Harcourt seemed so wrapped up in his girls. It was a pity they never had a son — Ah? Indeed! Then there was a son? So — and father and son had quarreled? That was so sad. And for some trifling cause, no doubt?

"I believe he married the housemaid," said Grant grimly. "Be careful! — Allow me."

"It 's no use!" said Mrs. Ashwood, flushing with pink impatience, as she recovered her seat, which a sudden bolt of her mustang had imperiled, "I really can't make out the tricks of this beast! Thank you," she added, with a sweet smile, "but I think I can manage him now. I can't see why he stopped. I 'll be more careful. You were saying the son was married — surely not that boy!"

"Boy!" echoed Grant. "Then you know" —

"I mean of course he must be a boy — they all grew up here — and it was only five or six years ago that their parents emigrated," she retorted a little impatiently. "And what about this creature?"

"Your horse?"

"You know I mean the woman he married. Of course she was older than he — and caught him?"

"I think there was a year or two difference," said Grant quietly.

"Yes, but your gallantry keeps you from telling the truth; which is that the women, in cases of this kind, are much older and more experienced."

"Are they? Well, perhaps she is, *now*. She is dead."

Mrs. Ashwood walked her horse. "Poor thing," she said. Then a sudden idea took possession of her and brought a film to her eyes. "How long ago?" she asked in a low voice.

"About six or seven months, I think. I believe there was a baby who died too."

She continued to walk her horse slowly, stroking its curved neck. "I think it 's perfectly shameful!" she said suddenly.

"Not so bad as that, Mrs. Ashwood, surely. The girl may have loved him — and he" —

"You know perfectly what I mean, Mr. Grant. I speak of the conduct of the mother and father and those two sisters!"

Grant slightly elevated his eyebrows. "But you forget, Mrs. Ashwood. It was young Harcourt and his wife's own act. They preferred to take their own path and keep it."

"I think," said Mrs. Ashwood authoritatively, "that the idea of leaving those two unfortunate children to suffer and struggle on alone — out there — on the sand hills of San Francisco — was simply disgraceful!"

Later that evening she was unreasonably annoyed to find that her brother, Mr. John Shipley, had taken advantage of the absence of Grant to pay marked attention to Clementina, and had even prevailed upon that imperious goddess to accompany him after dinner on a moonlight stroll upon the veranda and terraces of Los Pajaros. Nevertheless she seemed to recover her spirits enough to talk volubly of

the beautiful scenery she had discovered in her late perilous abandonment in the wilds of the Coast Range; to aver her intention to visit it again; to speak of it in a severely practical way as offering a far better site for the cottages of the young married couples just beginning life than the outskirts of towns or the bleak sand hills of San Francisco; and thence by graceful degrees into a dissertation upon popular fallacies in regard to hasty marriages, and the mistaken idea of some parents in not accepting the inevitable and making the best of it. She still found time to enter into an appreciative and exhaustive criticism upon the literature and journalistic enterprise of the Pacific Coast with the proprietor of the "Pioneer," and to cause that gentleman to declare that whatever people might say about rich and fashionable Eastern women, that Mrs. Ashwood's head was about as level as it was pretty.

The next morning found her more thoughtful and subdued; and when her brother came upon her sitting on the veranda, while the party were preparing to return, she was reading a newspaper slip that she had taken from her portemonnaie, with a face that was partly shadowed.

"What have you struck there, Conny?" said her brother gayly. "It looks too serious for a recipe."

"Something I should like you to read some time, Jack," she said, lifting her lashes with a slight timidity, "if you would take the trouble. I really wonder how it would impress you."

"Pass it over," said Jack Shipley good humoredly, with his cigar between his lips. "I 'll take it now."

She handed him the slip and turned partly away; he took it, glanced at it sideways, turned it over, and suddenly his look grew concentrated, and he took the cigar from his lips.

"Well," she said playfully, turning to him again. "What do you think of it?"

"Think of it?" he said, with a rising color. "I think it's infamous! Who did it?"

She stared at him, then glanced quickly at the slip. "What are you reading?" she said.

"This, of course," he said impatiently. "What you gave me." But he was pointing to *the other side* of the newspaper slip.

She took it from him impatiently and read for the first time the printing on the reverse side of the article she had treasured so long. It was the concluding paragraph of an apparently larger editorial. "One thing is certain, that a man in Daniel Harcourt's position cannot afford to pass over in silence accusations like the above, that affect not only his private character, but the integrity of his title to the land that was the foundation of his fortune. When trickery, sharp practice, and even criminality in the past are more than hinted at, they cannot be met by mere pompous silence or allusions to private position, social prestige, or distinguished friends in the present."

Mrs. Ashwood turned the slip over with scornful impatience, a pretty uplifting of her eyebrows, and a slight curl of her lip. "I suppose none of those people's beginnings can bear looking into — and they certainly should be the last ones to find fault with anybody. But, good gracious, Jack! what has this to do with you?"

"With me?" said Shipley angrily. "Why, I proposed to Clementina last night!"

CHAPTER IX

The wayfarers on the Tasajara turnpike, whom Mr. Daniel Harcourt passed with his fast trotting mare and sulky, saw that their great fellow townsman was more than usually preoccupied and curt in his acknowledgment of their salutations. Nevertheless as he drew near the creek, he partly checked his horse; and when he reached a slight acclivity of the interminable plain — which had really been the bank of the creek in bygone days — he pulled up, alighted, tied his horse to a rail fence, and, clambering over the inclosure, made his way along the ridge. It was covered with nettles, thistles, and a few wiry dwarf larches of native growth; dust from the adjacent highway had invaded it, with a few scattered and torn handbills, waste paper, rags, empty provision cans, and other suburban débris. Yet it was the site of 'Lige Curtis's cabin, long since erased and forgotten. The bed of the old creek had receded; the last tules had been cleared away; the channel and embarcadero were half a mile from the bank and log whereon the pioneer of Tasajara had idly sunned himself.

Mr. Harcourt walked on, occasionally turning over the scattered objects with his foot, and stopping at times to examine the ground more closely. It had not apparently been disturbed since he himself, six years ago, had razed the wretched shanty and carried off its timbers to aid in the erection of a larger cabin further inland. He raised his eyes to the prospect before him, — to the town with its steamboats lying at the wharves, to the grain elevator, the warehouses, the railroad station with its puffing en-

gines, the flagstaff of Harcourt House, and the clustering roofs of the town, and beyond, the painted dome of his last creation, the Free Library. This was all *his* work, *his* planning, *his* foresight, whatever they might say of the wandering drunkard from whose tremulous fingers he had snatched the opportunity. They could not take *that* from him, however they might follow him with envy and reviling, any more than they could wrest from him the five years of peaceful possession. It was with something of the prosperous consciousness with which he had mounted the platform on the opening of the Free Library, that he now climbed into his buggy and drove away.

Nevertheless he stopped at his Land Office as he drove into town, and gave a few orders. "I want a strong picket fence put around the fifty-*vara* lot in block fifty-seven, and the ground cleared up at once. Let me know when the men get to work, and I 'll overlook them."

Reëntering his own house in the square, where Mrs. Harcourt and Clementina — who often accompanied him in those business visits — were waiting for him with luncheon, he smiled somewhat superciliously as the servant informed him that "Professor Grant had just arrived." Really that man was trying to make the most of his time with Clementina! Perhaps the rival attractions of that Boston swell Shipley had something to do with it! He must positively talk to Clementina about this. In point of fact he himself was a little disappointed in Grant, who, since his offer to take the task of hunting down his calumniators, had really done nothing. He turned into his study, but was slightly astonished to find that Grant, instead of paying court to Clementina in the adjoining drawing-room, was sitting rather thoughtfully in his own armchair.

He rose as Harcourt entered. "I did n't let them announce me to the ladies," he said, "as I have some important business with you first, and we may find it necessary

that I should take the next train back to town. You remember that a few weeks ago I offered to look into the matter of those slanders against you. I apprehended it would be a trifling matter of envy or jealousy on the part of your old associates or neighbors which could be put straight with a little good feeling; but I must be frank with you, Harcourt, and say at the beginning that it turns out to be an infernally ugly business. Call it conspiracy if you like, or organized hostility, I 'm afraid it will require a lawyer rather than an arbitrator to manage it, and the sooner the better. For the most unpleasant thing about it is, that I can't find out exactly *how bad* it is!"

Unfortunately the weaker instinct of Harcourt's nature was first roused; the vulgar rage which confounds the bearer of ill news with the news itself filled his breast. "And this is all that your confounded intermeddling came to?" he said brutally.

"No," said Grant quietly, with a preoccupied ignoring of the insult that was more hopeless for Harcourt. "I found out that it is claimed that this 'Lige Curtis was not drowned nor lost that night; but that he escaped, and for three years has convinced another man that you are wrongfully in possession of this land; that these two naturally hold you in their power, and that they are only waiting for you to be forced into legal proceedings for slander to prove all their charges. Until then, for some reason best known to themselves, Curtis remains in the background."

"Does he deny the deed under which I hold the property?" said Harcourt savagely.

"He says it was only a security for a trifling loan, and not an actual transfer."

"And don't those fools know that his security could be forfeited?"

"Yes, but not in the way it is recorded in the county clerk's office. They say that the record shows that there

was an interpolation in the paper he left with you — which was a forgery. Briefly, Harcourt, you are accused of that. More, — it is intimated that when he fell into the creek that night, and escaped on a raft that was floating past, that he had been first stunned by a blow from some one interested in getting rid of him."

He paused and glanced out of the window.

"Is that all?" asked Harcourt in a perfectly quiet, steady voice.

"All!" replied Grant, struck with the change in his companion's manner, and turning his eyes upon him quickly.

The change indeed was marked and significant. Whether from relief at knowing the worst, or whether he was experiencing the same reaction from the utter falsity of this last accusation that he had felt when Grant had unintentionally wronged him in his previous recollection, certain it is that some unknown reserve of strength in his own nature, of which he knew nothing before, suddenly came to his aid in this extremity. It invested him with an uncouth dignity that for the first time excited Grant's respect.

"I beg your pardon, Grant, for the hasty way I spoke to you a moment ago, for I thank you, and appreciate thoroughly and sincerely what you have done. You are right; it is a matter for fighting and not fussing over. But I must have a head to hit. Whose is it?"

"The man who holds himself legally responsible is Fletcher, — the proprietor of the 'Clarion,' and a man of property."

"The 'Clarion'? That is the paper which began the attack?" said Harcourt.

"Yes, and it is only fair to tell you here that your son threw up his place on it in consequence of its attack upon you."

There was perhaps the slightest possible shrinking in Harcourt's eyelids, — the one congenital likeness to his discarded son, — but his otherwise calm demeanor did not change. Grant went on more cheerfully: "I 've told you all I know. When I spoke of an unknown *worst*, I did not refer to any further accusation, but to whatever evidence they might have fabricated or suborned to prove any one of them. It is only the strength and fairness of the hands they hold that is uncertain. Against that you have your certain uncontested possession, the peculiar character and antecedents of this 'Lige Curtis, which would make his evidence untrustworthy and even make it difficult for them to establish his identity. I am told that his failure to contest your appropriation of his property is explained by the fact of his being absent from the country most of the time; but again, this would not account for their silence until within the last six months, unless they have been waiting for further evidence to establish it. But even then they must have known that the time of recovery had passed. You are a practical man, Harcourt; I need n't tell you, therefore, what your lawyer will probably tell you, that practically, so far as your rights are concerned, you remain as before these calumnies; that a cause of action unprosecuted or in abeyance is practically no cause, and that it is not for you to anticipate one. *But*" —

He paused and looked steadily at Harcourt. Harcourt met his look with a dull, oxlike stolidity. "I shall begin the suit at once," he said.

"And I," said Grant, holding out his hand, "will stand by you. But tell me now what you knew of this man Curtis, — his character and disposition; it may be some clue as to what are his methods and his intentions."

Harcourt briefly sketched 'Lige Curtis as he knew him and understood him. It was another indication of his reserved power that the description was so singularly clear,

practical, unprejudiced, and impartial that it impressed Grant with its truthfulness.

"I can't make him out," he said; "you have drawn a weak, but neither a dishonest nor malignant man. There must have been somebody behind him. Can you think of any personal enemy?"

"I have been subjected to the usual jealousy and envy of my old neighbors, I suppose, but nothing more. I have harmed no one knowingly."

Grant was silent; it had flashed across him that Rice might have harbored revenge for his father-in-law's interference in his brief matrimonial experience. He had also suddenly recalled his conversation with Billings on the day that he first arrived at Tasajara. It would not be strange if this man had some intimation of the secret. He would try to find him that evening. He rose.

"You will stay to dinner? My wife and Clementina will expect you."

"Not to-night; I am dining at the hotel," said Grant smilingly; "but I will come in later in the evening if I may." He paused hesitatingly for a moment. "Have your wife and daughters ever expressed any opinion on this matter?"

"No," said Harcourt. "Mrs. Harcourt knows nothing of anything that does not happen *in* the house; Euphemia knows only the things that happen out of it where she is visiting — and I suppose that young men prefer to talk to her about other things than the slanders of her father. And Clementina — well, you know how calm and superior to these things *she* is."

"For that very reason I thought that perhaps she might be able to see them more clearly, — but no matter! I dare say you are quite right in not discussing them at home." This was the fact, although Grant had not forgotten that Harcourt had put forward his daughters as a reason for

stopping the scandal some weeks before, — a reason which, however, seemed never to have been borne out by any apparent sensitiveness of the girls themselves.

When Grant had left, Harcourt remained for some moments steadfastly gazing from the window over the Tasajara plain. He had not lost his look of concentrated power, nor his determination to fight. A struggle between himself and the phantoms of the past had become now a necessary stimulus for its own sake, — for the sake of his mental and physical equipoise. He saw before him the pale, agitated, irresolute features of 'Lige Curtis, — not the man *he* had injured, but the man who had injured *him*, whose spirit was aimlessly and wantonly — for he had never attempted to get back his possessions in his lifetime, nor ever tried to communicate with the possessor — striking at him in the shadow. And it was *that* man, that pale, writhing, frightened wretch whom he had once mercifully helped! Yes, whose *life* he had even saved that night from exposure and delirium tremens when he had given him the whiskey. And this life he had saved, only to have it set in motion a conspiracy to ruin him! Who knows that 'Lige had not purposely conceived what they had believed to be an attempt at suicide, only to cast suspicion of murder on *him!* From which it will be perceived that Harcourt's powers of moral reasoning had not improved in five years, and that even the impartiality he had just shown in his description of 'Lige to Grant had been swallowed up in this new sense of injury. The founder of Tasajara, whose cool business logic, unfailing foresight, and practical deductions were never at fault, was once more childishly adrift in his moral ethics.

And there was Clementina, of whose judgment Grant had spoken so persistently, — could she assist him? It was true, as he had said, he had never talked to her of his affairs. In his sometimes uneasy consciousness of her su-

periority he had shrunk from even revealing his anxieties, much less his actual secret, and from anything that might prejudice the lofty paternal attitude he had taken towards his daughters from the beginning of his good fortune. He was never quite sure if her acceptance of it was real; he was never entirely free from a certain jealousy that always mingled with his pride in her superior rectitude; and yet his feeling was distinct from the good-natured contempt he had for his wife's loyalty, the anger and suspicion that his son's opposition had provoked, and the half-affectionate toleration he had felt for Euphemia's waywardness. However, he would sound Clementina without betraying himself.

He was anticipated by a slight step in the passage and the pushing open of his study door. The tall, graceful figure of the girl herself stood in the opening.

"They tell me Mr. Grant has been here. Does he stay to dinner?"

"No, he has an engagement at the hotel, but he will probably drop in later. Come in, Clemmy; I want to talk to you. Shut the door and sit down."

She slipped in quietly, shut the door, took a seat on the sofa, softly smoothed down her gown, and turned her graceful head and serenely composed face towards him. Sitting thus she looked like some finely finished painting that decorated rather than belonged to the room, — not only distinctly alien to the flesh and blood relative before her, but to the house, and even the local, monotonous landscape beyond the window, with the shining new shingles and chimneys that cut the new blue sky. These singular perfections seemed to increase in Harcourt's mind the exasperating sense of injury inflicted upon him by 'Lige's exposures. With a daughter so incomparably gifted, — a matchless creation that was enough in herself to ennoble that fortune which his own skill and genius had lifted from the muddy tules of Tasajara where this 'Lige had left it,

— that *she* should be subjected to this annoyance seemed an infamy that Providence could not allow! What was his mere venial transgression to this exaggerated retribution?

"Clemmy, girl, I 'm going to ask you a question. Listen, pet." He had begun with a reminiscent tenderness of the epoch of her childhood, but meeting the unresponding maturity of her clear eyes he abandoned it. "You know, Clementina, I have never interfered in your affairs, nor tried to influence your friendships for anybody. Whatever people may have to say of me they can't say that! I 've always trusted you, as I would myself, to choose your own associates; I have never regretted it, and I don't regret it now. But I 'd like to know — I have reasons to-day for asking — how matters stand between you and Grant."

The Parian head of Minerva on the bookcase above her did not offer the spectator a face less free from maidenly confusion than Clementina's at that moment. Her father had certainly expected none, but he was not prepared for the perfect coolness of her reply.

"Do you mean, have I *accepted* him?"

"No, — well — yes."

"No, then! Is that what he wished to see you about? It was understood that he was not to allude again to the subject to any one."

"He has not to *me*. It was only my own idea. He had something very different to tell me. You may not know, Clementina," he began cautiously, "that I have been lately the subject of some anonymous slanders, and Grant has taken the trouble to track them down for me. It is a calumny that goes back as far as Sidon, and I may want your level head and good memory to help me to refute it." He then repeated calmly and clearly, with no trace of the fury that had raged within him a moment before, the substance of Grant's revelation.

The young girl listened without apparent emotion. When he had finished she said quickly, "And what do you want me to recollect?"

The hardest part of Harcourt's task was coming. "Well, don't you remember that I told you the day the surveyors went away — that — I had bought this land of 'Lige Curtis some time before?"

"Yes, I remember your saying so, but" —

"But what?"

"I thought you only meant that to satisfy mother."

Daniel Harcourt felt the blood settling round his heart, but he was constrained by an irresistible impulse to know the worst. "Well, what did *you* think it really was?"

"I only thought that 'Lige Curtis had simply let you have it, that 's all."

Harcourt breathed again. "But what for? Why should he?"

"Well — *on my account.*"

"On *your* account! What in Heaven's name had *you* to do with it?"

"He loved me." There was not the slightest trace of vanity, self-consciousness, or coquetry in her quiet, fateful face, and for this very reason Harcourt knew that she was speaking the truth.

"Loved *you!* — you, Clementina! — my daughter! Did he ever *tell* you so?"

"Not in words. He used to walk up and down on the road when I was at the back window or in the garden, and often hung about the bank of the creek for hours, like some animal. I don't think the others saw him, and when they did they thought it was Parmlee for Euphemia. Even Euphemia thought so too, and that was why she was so conceited and hard to Parmlee towards the end. She thought it was Parmlee that night when Grant and Rice came; but it was 'Lige Curtis who had been watching the

window lights in the rain, and who must have gone off at last to speak to you in the store. I always let Phemie believe that it was Parmlee, — it seemed to please her."

There was not the least tone of mischief, or superiority, or even of patronage in her manner. It was as quiet and cruel as the fate that might have led 'Lige to his destruction. Even her father felt a slight thrill of awe as she paused. "Then he never really spoke to you?" he asked hurriedly.

"Only once. I was gathering swamp lilies all alone, a mile below the bend of the creek, and he came upon me suddenly. Perhaps it was that I did n't jump or start — *I* did n't see anything to jump or start at — that he said, 'You 're not frightened at me, Miss Harcourt, like the other girls? You don't think I 'm drunk or half mad — as they do?' I don't remember exactly what I said, but it meant that whether he was drunk or half mad or sober I did n't see any reason to be afraid of him. And then he told me that if I was fond of swamp lilies I might have all I wanted at his place, and, for the matter of that, the place, too, as he was going away, for he could n't stand the loneliness any longer. He said that he had nothing in common with the place and the people — no more than *I* had — and that was what he had always fancied in me. I told him that if he felt in that way about his place he ought to leave it, or sell it to some one who cared for it, and go away. That must have been in his mind when he offered it to you, — at least that 's what I thought when you told us you had bought it. I did n't know but what he might have told you, but you did n't care to say it before mother."

Mr. Harcourt sat gazing at her with breathless amazement. "And you — think that — 'Lige Curtis — lov — liked you?"

"Yes, I think he did — and that he does now!"

"*Now!* What do you mean? The man is dead!" said Harcourt, starting.

"That 's just what I don't believe."

"Impossible! Think of what you are saying."

"I never could quite understand or feel that he was dead when everybody said so, and now that I 've heard this story I *know* that he is living."

"But why did he not make himself known in time to claim the property?"

"Because he did not care for it."

"What did he care for, then?"

"Me, I suppose."

"But this calumny is not like a man who loves you."

"It is like a *jealous* one."

With an effort Harcourt threw off his bewildered incredulity and grasped the situation. He would have to contend with his enemy in the flesh and blood, but that flesh and blood would be very weak in the hands of the impassive girl beside him. His face lightened.

The same idea might have been in Clementina's mind when she spoke again, although her face had remained unchanged. "I do not see why *you* should bother yourself further about it," she said. "It is only a matter between myself and him; you can leave it to me."

"But if you are mistaken and he should not be living?"

"I am not mistaken. I am even certain now that I have seen him."

"Seen him!"

"Yes," said the girl, with the first trace of animation in her face. "It was four or five months ago when we were visiting the Briones at Monterey. We had ridden out to the old Mission by moonlight. There were some Mexicans lounging around the posada, and one of them attracted my attention by the way he seemed to watch me, without revealing any more of his face than I could see between his serape and the black silk handkerchief that was tied around his head under his sombrero. But I knew he was an

American — and his eyes were familiar. I believe it was he."

"Why did you not speak of it before?"

The look of animation died out of the girl's face. "Why should I?" she said listlessly. "I did not know of these reports then. He was nothing more to us. You would n't have cared to see him again." She rose, smoothed out her skirt, and stood looking at her father. "There is one thing, of course, that you 'll do at once."

Her voice had changed so oddly that he said quickly, "What 's that?"

"Call Grant off the scent. He 'll only frighten or exasperate your game, and that 's what you don't want."

Her voice was as imperious as it had been previously listless. And it was the first time he had ever known her to use slang. It seemed as startling as if it had fallen from the marble lips above him.

"But I 've promised him that we should go together to my lawyer to-morrow, and begin a suit against the proprietors of the 'Clarion.'"

"Do nothing of the kind. Get rid of Grant's assistance in this matter; and see the 'Clarion' proprietor yourself. What sort of a man is he? Can you invite him to your house?"

"I have never seen him; I believe he lives at San José. He is a wealthy man and a large landowner there. You understand that after the first article appeared in his paper, and I knew that he had employed your brother, — although Grant says that he had nothing to do with it and left Fletcher on account of it, — I could have no intercourse with him. Even if I invited him he would not come."

"He *must* come. Leave it to *me*." She stopped and resumed her former impassive manner. "I had something to say to you too, father. Mr. Shipley proposed to me the day we went to San Mateo."

Her father's eyes lit with an eager sparkle. "Well," he said quickly.

"I reminded him that I had known him only a few weeks, and that I wanted time to consider."

"Consider! Why, Clemmy, he 's one of the oldest Boston families, rich from his father and grandfather — rich when I was a shopkeeper and your mother" —

"I thought you liked Grant?" she said quietly.

"Yes, but if *you* have no choice nor feeling in the matter, why Shipley is far the better man. And if any of the scandal should come to his ears" —

"So much the better that the hesitation should come from me. But if you think it better, I can sit down here and write to him at once declining the offer." She moved towards the desk.

"No! No! I did not mean that," said Harcourt quickly. "I only thought that if he did hear anything it might be said that he had backed out."

"His sister knows of his offer, and, though she don't like it nor me, she will not deny the fact. By the way, you remember when she was lost that day on the road to San Mateo?"

"Yes."

"Well, she was with your son, John Milton, all the time, and they lunched together at Crystal Spring. It came out quite accidentally through the hotel-keeper."

Harcourt's brow darkened. "Did she know him before?"

"I can't say; but she does now."

Harcourt's face was heavy with distrust. "Taking Shipley's offer and these scandals into consideration, I don't like the look of this, Clementina."

"I do," said the girl simply.

Harcourt gazed at her keenly and with the shadow of distrust still upon him. It seemed to be quite impossible,

even with what he knew of her calmly cold nature, that she should be equally uninfluenced by Grant or Shipley. Had she some steadfast, lofty ideal, or perhaps some already absorbing passion of which he knew nothing? She was not a girl to betray it — they would only know it when it was too late. Could it be possible that there was still something between her and 'Lige that he knew nothing of? The thought struck a chill to his breast. She was walking towards the door, when he recalled himself with an effort.

"If you think it advisable to see Fletcher, you might run down to San José for a day or two with your mother, and call on the Ramirez. They may know him or somebody who does. Of course if *you* meet him and casually invite him it would be different."

"It 's a good idea," she said quickly. "I 'll do it, and speak to mother now."

He was struck by the change in her face and voice; they had both nervously lightened, as oddly and distinctly as they had before seemed to grow suddenly harsh and aggressive. She passed out of the room with girlish brusqueness, leaving him alone with a new and vague fear in his consciousness.

A few hours later Clementina was standing before the window of the drawing-room that overlooked the outskirts of the town. The moonlight was flooding the vast bluish Tasajara levels with a faint lustre, as if the waters of the creek had once more returned to them. In the shadow of the curtain beside her Grant was facing her with anxious eyes.

"Then I must take this as your final answer, Clementina?"

"You must. And had I known of these calumnies before, had you been frank with me even the day we went to San Mateo, my answer would have been as final then, and

you might have been spared any further suspense. I am not blaming you, Mr. Grant; I am willing to believe that you thought it best to conceal this from me, — even at that time when you had just pledged yourself to find out its truth or falsehood, — yet my answer would have been the same. So long as this stain rests on my father's name I shall never allow that name to be coupled with yours in marriage or engagement; nor will my pride or yours allow us to carry on a simple friendship after this. I thank you for your offer of assistance, but I cannot even accept that which might to others seem to allow some contingent claim. I would rather believe that when you proposed this inquiry and my father permitted it, you both knew that it put an end to any other relations between us."

"But, Clementina, you are wrong, believe me! Say that I have been foolish, indiscreet, mad, — still the few who knew that I made these inquiries on your father's behalf know nothing of my hopes of *you!*"

"But *I* do, and that is enough for me."

Even in the hopeless preoccupation of his passion he suddenly looked at her with something of his old critical scrutiny. But she stood there calm, concentrated, self-possessed, and upright. Yes! it was possible that the pride of this Southwestern shopkeeper's daughter was greater than his own.

"Then you banish me, Clementina?"

"It is we whom *you* have banished."

"Good-night."

"Good-by."

He bent for an instant over her cold hand, and then passed out into the hall. She remained listening until the front door closed behind him. Then she ran swiftly through the hall and up the staircase, with an alacrity that seemed impossible to the stately goddess of a moment before. When she had reached her bedroom and closed the

door, so exuberant still and so uncontrollable was her levity and action, that without going round the bed which stood before her in the centre of the room, she placed her two hands upon it and lightly vaulted sideways across it to reach the window. There she watched the figure of Grant crossing the moonlit square. Then turning back into the half-lit room, she ran to the small dressing-glass placed at an angle on a toilet-table against the wall. With her palms grasping her knees she stooped down suddenly and contemplated the mirror. It showed what no one but Clementina had ever seen, — and she herself only at rare intervals, — the laughing eyes and soul of a self-satisfied, material-minded, ordinary country girl!

CHAPTER X

But Mr. Lawrence Grant's character in certain circumstances would seem to have as startling and inexplicable contradictions as Clementina Harcourt's, and three days later he halted his horse at the entrance of Los Gatos Rancho. The Home of the Cats, — so called from the catamounts which infested the locality, — which had for over a century lazily basked before one of the hottest cañons in the Coast Range, had lately been stirred into some activity by the American, Don Diego Fletcher, who had bought it, put up a sawmill, and deforested the cañon. Still there remained enough suggestion of a feline haunt about it to make Grant feel as if he had tracked hither some stealthy enemy, in spite of the peaceful intimation conveyed by the sign on a rough boarded shed at the wayside, that the "Los Gatos Land and Lumber Company" held their office there.

A cigarette-smoking peon lounged before the door. Yes; Don Diego was there, but as he had arrived from Santa Clara only last night and was going to Colonel Ramirez that afternoon, he was engaged. Unless the business was important — but the cool, determined manner of Grant, even more than his words, signified that it *was* important, and the servant led the way to Don Diego's presence.

There certainly was nothing in the appearance of this sylvan proprietor and newspaper capitalist to justify Grant's suspicion of a surreptitious foe. A handsome man scarcely older than himself, in spite of a wavy mass of perfectly white hair which contrasted singularly with his brown mustache and dark, sunburned face. So disguising was the

effect of these contradictions, that he not only looked unlike anybody else, but even his nationality seemed to be a matter of doubt. Only his eyes, light blue and intelligent, which had a singular expression of gentleness and worry, appeared individual to the man. His manner was cultivated and easy. He motioned his visitor courteously to a chair.

"I was referred to you," said Grant almost abruptly, "as the person responsible for a series of slanderous attacks against Mr. Daniel Harcourt in the 'Clarion,' of which paper I believe you are the proprietor. I was told that you declined to give the authority for your action, unless you were forced to by legal proceedings."

Fletcher's sensitive blue eyes rested upon Grant's with an expression of constrained pain and pity. "I heard of your inquiries, Mr. Grant; you were making them on behalf of this Mr. Harcourt or Harkutt" — he made the distinction with intentional deliberation — "with a view, I believe, to some arbitration. The case was stated to you fairly, I think; I believe I have nothing to add to it."

"That was your answer to the ambassador of Mr. Harcourt," said Grant coldly, "and as such I delivered it to him; but I am here to-day to speak on my own account."

What could be seen of Mr. Fletcher's lips appeared to curl in an odd smile. "Indeed, I thought it was — or would be — all in the family."

Grant's face grew more stern, and his gray eyes glittered. "You 'll find my status in this matter so far independent that I don't propose, like Mr. Harcourt, either to begin a suit or to rest quietly under the calumny. Briefly, Mr. Fletcher, as you or your informant knows, I was the surveyor who revealed to Mr. Harcourt the value of the land to which he claimed a title from your man, — this Elijah or 'Lige Curtis, as you call him," — he could not resist this imitation of his adversary's supercilious affectation of pre-

cise nomenclature, — "and it was upon my representation of its value as an investment that he began the improvements which have made him wealthy. If this title was fraudulently obtained, all the facts pertaining to it are sufficiently related to connect me with the conspiracy."

"Are you not a little hasty in your presumption, Mr. Grant?" said Fletcher, with unfeigned surprise.

"That is for *me* to judge, Mr. Fletcher," returned Grant haughtily.

"But the name of Professor Grant is known to all California as beyond the breath of calumny or suspicion."

"It is because of that fact that I propose to keep it so."

"And may I ask in what way you wish me to assist you in so doing?"

"By promptly and publicly retracting in the 'Clarion' every word of this slander against Harcourt."

Fletcher looked steadfastly at the speaker. "And if I decline?"

"I think you have been long enough in California, Mr. Fletcher, to know the alternative expected of a gentleman," said Grant coldly.

Mr. Fletcher kept his gentle blue eyes — in which surprise still overbalanced their expression of pained concern — on Grant's face.

"But is not this more in the style of Colonel Starbottle than Professor Grant?" he asked, with a faint smile.

Grant rose instantly with a white face. "You will have a better opportunity of judging," he said, "when Colonel Starbottle has the honor of waiting upon you from me. Meantime, I thank you for reminding me of the indiscretion into which my folly, in still believing that this thing could be settled amicably, has led me."

He bowed coldly and withdrew. Nevertheless, as he mounted his horse and rode away, he felt his cheeks burning. Yet he had acted upon calm consideration; he knew

that to the ordinary Californian experience there was nothing quixotic nor exaggerated in the attitude he had taken. Men had quarreled and fought on less grounds; he had even half convinced himself that he *had* been insulted, and that his own professional reputation demanded the withdrawal of the attack on Harcourt on purely business grounds; but he was not satisfied of the personal responsibility of Fletcher nor of his gratuitous malignity. Nor did the man look like a tool in the hands of some unscrupulous and hidden enemy. However, he had played his card. If he succeeded only in provoking a duel with Fletcher, he at least would divert the public attention from Harcourt to himself. He knew that his superior position would throw the lesser victim in the background. He would make the sacrifice; that was his duty as a gentleman, even if *she* would not care to accept it as an earnest of his unselfish love!

He had reached the point where the mountain track entered the Santa Clara turnpike when his attention was attracted by a handsome but old-fashioned carriage drawn by four white mules, which passed down the road before him and turned suddenly off into a private road. But it was not this picturesque gala equipage of some local Spanish grandee that brought a thrill to his nerves and a flash to his eye; it was the unmistakable, tall, elegant figure and handsome profile of Clementina, reclining in light gauzy wraps against the back seat! It was no fanciful resemblance, the outcome of his reverie, — there never was any one like her! — it *was* she herself! But what was she doing here?

A vaquero cantered from the cross-road where the dust of the vehicle still hung. Grant hailed him. Ah! it was a fine *carroza de cuatro mulas* that he had just passed! Si, señor, truly; it was of Don José Ramirez, who lived just under the hill. It was bringing company to the casa.

Ramirez! That was where Fletcher was going! Had Clementina known that he was one of Fletcher's friends? Might she not be exposed to unpleasantness, marked coolness, or even insult in that unexpected meeting? Ought she not to be warned or prepared for it? She had banished Grant from her presence until this stain was removed from her father's name, but could she blame him for trying to save her from contact with her father's slanderer? No! He turned his horse abruptly into the cross-road and spurred forward in the direction of the casa.

It was quite visible now — a low-walled, quadrangular mass of whitewashed adobe lying like a drift on the green hillside. The carriage and four had far preceded him, and was already half up the winding road towards the house. Later he saw them reach the courtyard and disappear within. He would be quite in time to speak with her before she retired to change her dress. He would simply say that while making a professional visit to Los Gatos Land Company office he had become aware of Fletcher's connection with it, and accidentally of his intended visit to Ramirez. His chance meeting with the carriage on the highway had determined his course.

As he rode into the courtyard he observed that it was also approached by another road, evidently nearer Los Gatos, and probably the older and shorter communication between the two ranchos. The fact was significantly demonstrated a moment later. He had given his horse to a servant, sent in his card to Clementina, and had dropped listlessly on one of the benches of the gallery surrounding the patio, when a horseman rode briskly into the opposite gateway, and dismounted with a familiar air. A waiting peon who recognized him informed him that the doña was engaged with a visitor, but that they were both returning to the gallery for chocolate in a moment. The stranger was the man he had left only an hour before — Don Diego Fletcher!

In an instant the idiotic fatuity of his position struck him fully. His only excuse for following Clementina had been to warn her of the coming of this man who had just entered, and who would now meet her as quickly as himself. For a brief moment the idea of quietly slipping out to the corral, mounting his horse again, and flying from the rancho, crossed his mind; but the thought that he would be running away from the man he had just challenged, and perhaps some new hostility that had sprung up in his heart against him, compelled him to remain. The eyes of both men met; Fletcher's in half-wondering annoyance, Grant's in ill-concealed antagonism. What they would have said is not known, for at that moment the voices of Clementina and Mrs. Ramirez were heard in the passage, and they both entered the gallery. The two men were standing together; it was impossible to see one without the other.

And yet Grant, whose eyes were instantly directed to Clementina, thought that she had noted neither. She remained for an instant standing in the doorway in the same self-possessed, coldly graceful pose he remembered she had taken on the platform at Tasajara. Her eyelids were slightly downcast, as if she had been arrested by some sudden thought or some shy maiden sensitiveness; in her hesitation Mrs. Ramirez passed impatiently before her.

"Mother of God!" said that lively lady, regarding the two speechless men, "is it an indiscretion we are making here — or are you dumb? You, Don Diego, are loud enough when you and Don José are together; at least introduce your friend."

Grant quickly recovered himself. "I am afraid," he said, coming forward, "unless Miss Harcourt does, that I am a mere trespasser in your house, señora. I saw her pass in your carriage a few moments ago, and having a message for her I ventured to follow her here."

"It is Mr. Grant, a friend of my father's," said Clementina, smiling with equanimity, as if just awakening from a momentary abstraction, yet apparently unconscious of Grant's imploring eyes; "but the other gentleman I have not the pleasure of knowing."

"Ah! Don Diego Fletcher, a countryman of yours; and yet I think he knows you not."

Clementina's face betrayed no indication of the presence of her father's foe, and yet Grant knew that she must have recognized his name, as she looked towards Fletcher with perfect self-possession. He was too much engaged in watching her to take note of Fletcher's manifest disturbance, or the evident effort with which he at last bowed to her. That this unexpected double meeting with the daughter of the man he had wronged, and the man who had espoused the quarrel, should be confounding to him appeared only natural. But he was unprepared to understand the feverish alacrity with which he accepted Doña Maria's invitation to chocolate, or the equally animated way in which Clementina threw herself into her hostess's Spanish levity. He knew it was an awkward situation, that must be surmounted without a scene; he was quite prepared in the presence of Clementina to be civil to Fletcher; but it was odd that in this feverish exchange of courtesies and compliments *he*, Grant, should feel the greater awkwardness, and be the most ill at ease. He sat down and took his part in the conversation; he let it transpire for Clementina's benefit that he had been to Los Gatos only on business, yet there was no opportunity for even a significant glance, and he had the added embarrassment of seeing that she exhibited no surprise nor seemed to attach the least importance to his inopportune visit. In a miserable indecision he allowed himself to be carried away by the high-flown hospitality of his Spanish hostess, and consented to stay to an early dinner. It was part of the infelicity of

circumstance that the voluble Doña Maria — electing him as the distinguished stranger above the resident Fletcher — monopolized him and attached him to her side. She would do the honors of her house; she must show him the ruins of the old Mission beside the corral; Don Diego and Clementina would join them presently in the garden. He cast a despairing glance at the placidly smiling Clementina, who was apparently equally indifferent to the evident constraint and assumed ease of the man beside her, and turned away with Mrs. Ramirez.

A silence fell upon the gallery so deep that the receding voices and footsteps of Grant and his hostess in the long passage were distinctly heard until they reached the end. Then Fletcher arose with an inarticulate exclamation. Clementina instantly put her finger to her lips, glanced around the gallery, extended her hand to him, and saying "Come," half led, half dragged him into the passage. To the right she turned and pushed open the door of a small room that seemed a combination of boudoir and oratory, lit by a French window opening to the garden, and flanked by a large black and white crucifix with a *prie-dieu* beneath it. Closing the door behind them she turned and faced her companion. But it was no longer the face of the woman who had been sitting in the gallery; it was the face that had looked back at her from the mirror at Tasajara the night that Grant had left her — eager, flushed, material with commonplace excitement!

"'Lige Curtis," she said.

"Yes," he answered passionately, "'Lige Curtis, whom you thought dead! 'Lige Curtis, whom you once pitied, condoled with, and despised! 'Lige Curtis, whose lands and property have enriched you! 'Lige Curtis, who would have shared it with you freely at the time, but whom your father juggled and defrauded of it! 'Lige Curtis, branded by him as a drunken outcast and suicide! 'Lige Curtis" —

"Hush!" She clapped her little hand over his mouth with a quick but awkward schoolgirl gesture, inconceivable to any who had known her usual languid elegance of motion, and held it there. He struggled angrily, impatiently, reproachfully, and then, with a sudden characteristic weakness that seemed as much of a revelation as her once hoydenish manner, kissed it, when she let it drop. Then placing both her hands still girlishly on her slim waist and curtsying grotesquely before him, she said: "'Lige Curtis! Oh yes! 'Lige Curtis, who swore to do everything for me! 'Lige Curtis, who promised to give up liquor for me, — who was to leave Tasajara for me! 'Lige Curtis, who was to reform, and keep his land as a nest-egg for us both in the future, and then who sold it — and himself — and me — to dad for a glass of whiskey! 'Lige Curtis, who disappeared, and then let us think he was dead, only that he might attack us out of the ambush of his grave!"

"Yes, but think what *I* have suffered all these years; not for the cursed land — you know I never cared for that — but for *you*, — you, Clementina, — *you* rich, admired by every one; idolized, held far above me, — *me*, the forgotten outcast, the wretched suicide — and yet the man to whom you had once plighted your troth. Which of those greedy fortune-hunters whom my money — my life-blood as you might have thought it was — attracted to you, did you care to tell that you had ever slipped out of the little garden gate at Sidon to meet that outcast! Do you wonder that as the years passed and *you* were happy, *I* did not choose to be so forgotten? Do you wonder that when *you* shut the door on the past *I* managed to open it again — if only a little way — that its light might startle you?"

Yet she did not seem startled or disturbed, and remained only looking at him critically.

"You say that you have suffered," she replied, with a smile. "You don't look it! Your hair is white, but it

is becoming to you, and you are a handsomer man, 'Lige Curtis, than you were when I first met you; you are finer," she went on, still regarding him, "stronger, and healthier than you were five years ago; you are rich and prosperous, you have everything to make you happy, but" — here she laughed a little, held out both her hands, taking his and holding his arms apart in a rustic, homely fashion — "but you are still the same old 'Lige Curtis! It was like you to go off and hide yourself in that idiotic way; it was like you to let the property slide in that stupid, unselfish fashion; it was like you to get real mad, and say all those mean, silly things to dad, that did n't hurt him — in your regular loony style; for rich or poor, drunk or sober, ragged or elegant, plain or handsome, — you 're always the same 'Lige Curtis!"

In proportion as that material, practical, rustic self — which nobody but 'Lige Curtis had ever seen — came back to her, so in proportion the irresolute, wavering, weak, and emotional vagabond of Sidon came out to meet it. He looked at her with a vague smile; his five years of childish resentment, albeit carried on the shoulders of a man mentally and morally her superior, melted away. He drew her towards him, yet at the same moment a quick suspicion returned.

"Well, and what are you doing here? Has this man who has followed you any right, any claim upon you?"

"None but what you in your folly have forced upon him! You have made him father's ally. I don't know why he came here. I only know why *I* did — to find *you!*"

"You suspected then?"

"I *knew!* Hush!"

The returning voices of Grant and of Mrs. Ramirez were heard in the courtyard Clementina made a warning yet girlishly mirthful gesture, again caught his hand, drew him

quickly to the French window, and slipped through it with him into the garden, where they were quickly lost in the shadows of a ceanothus hedge.

"They have probably met Don José in the orchard, and as he and Don Diego have business together, Doña Clementina has without doubt gone to her room and left them. For you are not very entertaining to the ladies to-day, — you two caballeros! You have much politics together, eh? — or you have discussed and disagreed, eh? I will look for the señorita, and let you go, Don Distraido!"

It is to be feared that Grant's apologies and attempts to detain her were equally feeble, — as it seemed to him that this was the only chance he might have of seeing Clementina except in company with Fletcher. As Mrs. Ramirez left he lit a cigarette and listlessly walked up and down the gallery. But Clementina did not come, neither did his hostess return. A subdued step in the passage raised his hopes, — it was only the grizzled major domo, to show him his room that he might prepare for dinner.

He followed mechanically down the long passage to a second corridor. There was a chance that he might meet Clementina, but he reached his room without encountering any one. It was a large vaulted apartment with a single window, a deep embrasure in the thick wall that seemed to focus like a telescope some forgotten, sequestered part of the leafy garden. While washing his hands, gazing absently at the green vignette framed by the dark opening, his attention was drawn to a movement of the foliage, stirred apparently by the rapid passage of two half-hidden figures. The quick flash of a feminine skirt seemed to indicate the coy flight of some romping maid of the casa, and the pursuit and struggle of her vaquero swain. To a despairing lover even the spectacle of innocent, pastoral happiness in others is not apt to be soothing, and Grant was turning impatiently away when he suddenly stopped with a rigid

face and quickly approached the window. In her struggles with the unseen Corydon, the clustering leaves seemed to have yielded at the same moment with the coy Chloris, and parting — disclosed a stolen kiss! Grant's hand lay like ice against the wall. For, disengaging Fletcher's arm from her waist and freeing her skirt from the foliage, it was the calm, passionless Clementina herself who stepped out, and moved pensively towards the casa.

CHAPTER XI

"READERS of the 'Clarion' will have noticed that allusion has been frequently made in these columns to certain rumors concerning the early history of Tasajara which were supposed to affect the pioneer record of Daniel Harcourt. It was deemed by the conductors of this journal to be only consistent with the fearless and independent duty undertaken by the 'Clarion' that these rumors should be fully chronicled as part of the information required by the readers of a first-class newspaper, unbiased by any consideration of the social position of the parties, but simply as a matter of news. For this the 'Clarion' does not deem it necessary to utter a word of apology. But for that editorial comment or attitude which the proprietors felt was justified by the reliable sources of their information they now consider it only due in honor to themselves, their readers, and Mr. Harcourt to fully and freely apologize. A patient and laborious investigation enables them to state that the alleged facts published by the 'Clarion' and copied by other journals are utterly unsupported by testimony, and the charges — although more or less vague — which were based upon them are equally untenable. We are now satisfied that one 'Elijah Curtis,' a former pioneer of Tasajara who disappeared five years ago, and was supposed to be drowned, has not only made no claim to the Tasajara property, as alleged but has given no sign of his equally alleged resuscitation and present existence, and that on the minutest investigation there appears nothing either in his disappearance, or the transfer of his property to Daniel Harcourt, that could

in any way disturb the uncontested title to Tasajara or the unimpeachable character of its present owner. The whole story now seems to have been the outcome of one of those stupid rural hoaxes too common in California."

"Well," said Mrs. Ashwood, laying aside the "Clarion" with a skeptical shrug of her pretty shoulders, as she glanced up at her brother, "I suppose this means that you are going to propose again to the young lady?"

"I have," said Jack Shipley, "that 's the worst of it — and got my answer before this came out."

"Jack!" said Mrs. Ashwood, thoroughly surprised.

"Yes! You see, Conny, as I told you three weeks ago, she said she wanted time to consider, — that she scarcely knew me, and all that! Well, I thought it was n't exactly a gentleman's business to seem to stand off after that last attack on her father, and so, last week, I went down to San José, where she was staying, and begged her not to keep me in suspense. And, by Jove! she froze me with a look, and said that with these aspersions on her father's character, she preferred not to be under obligations to any one."

"And you believed her?"

"Oh, hang it all! Look here, Conny, — I wish you 'd just try for once to find out some good in that family, besides what that sentimental young widower John Milton may have. You seem to think because they 've quarreled with *him* there is n't a virtue left among them."

Far from seeming to offer any suggestion of feminine retaliation, Mrs. Ashwood smiled sweetly. "My dear Jack, I have no desire to keep you from trying your luck again with Miss Clementina, if that 's what you mean, and indeed I should n't be surprised if a family who felt a *mésalliance* as sensitively as the Harcourts felt that affair of their son's would be as keenly alive to the advantages of a good match

for their daughter. As to young Mr. Harcourt, he never talked to me of the vices of his family, nor has he lately troubled me much with the presence of his own virtues. I have n't heard from him since we came here."

"I suppose he is satisfied with the government berth you got for him," returned her brother dryly.

"He was very grateful to Senator Flynn, who appreciates his talents, but who offered it to him as a mere question of fitness," replied Mrs. Ashwood, with great precision of statement. "But you don't seem to know he declined it on account of his other work."

"Preferred his old Bohemian ways, eh? You can't change those fellows, Conny. They can't get over the fascinations of vagabondage. Sorry your lady-patroness scheme did n't work. Pity you could n't have promoted him in the line of his profession, as the Grand Duchess of Girolstein did Fritz."

"For Heaven's sake, Jack, go to Clementina! You may not be successful, but there at least the perfect gentlemanliness and good taste of your illustrations will not be thrown away."

"I think of going to San Francisco to-morrow, anyway," returned Jack, with affected carelessness. "I 'm getting rather bored with this wild seaside watering-place and its glitter of ocean and hopeless background of mountain. It 's nothing to me that ' there 's no land nearer than Japan ' out there. It may be very healthful to the tissues, but it 's weariness to the spirit, and I don't see why we can't wait at San Francisco till the rains send us further south, as well as here."

He had walked to the balcony of their sitting-room in the little seaside hotel where this conversation took place, and gazed discontentedly over the curving bay and sandy shore before him. After a slight pause Mrs. Ashwood stepped out beside him.

"Very likely I may go with you," she said, with a perceptible tone of weariness. "We will see after the post arrives."

"By the way, there is a little package for you in my room, that came this morning. I brought it up, but forgot to give it to you. You 'll find it on my table."

Mrs. Ashwood abstractedly turned away and entered her brother's room from the same balcony. The forgotten parcel, which looked like a roll of manuscript, was lying on his dressing-table. She gazed attentively at the handwriting on the wrapper, and then gave a quick glance around her. A sudden and subtle change came over her. She neither flushed nor paled, nor did the delicate lines of expression in her face quiver or change. But as she held the parcel in her hand her whole being seemed to undergo some exquisite suffusion. As the medicines which the Arabian physician had concealed in the hollow handle of the mallet permeated the languid royal blood of Persia, so some volatile balm of youth seemed to flow in upon her with the contact of that strange missive and transform her weary spirit.

"Jack!" she called in a high, clear voice.

But Jack had already gone from the balcony when she reached it with an elastic step and a quick, youthful swirl and rustling of her skirt. He was lighting his cigar in the garden.

"Jack," she said, leaning half over the railing, "come back here in an hour and we 'll talk over that matter of yours again."

Jack looked up eagerly and as if he might even come up then; but she added quickly, "In about an hour — I must think it over," and withdrew.

She reëntered the sitting-room, shut the door carefully and locked it, half pulled down the blind, walking once or twice around the table on which the parcel lay, with one

eye on it like a graceful cat. Then she suddenly sat down, took it up with a grave, practical face, examined the postmark curiously, and opened it with severe deliberation. It contained a manuscript and a letter of four closely written pages. She glanced at the manuscript with bright approving eyes, ran her fingers through its leaves, and then laid it carefully and somewhat ostentatiously on the table beside her. Then, still holding the letter in her hand, she rose and glanced out of the window at her bored brother lounging towards the beach and at the heaving billows beyond, and returned to her seat. This apparently important preliminary concluded, she began to read.

There were, as already stated, four blessed pages of it! All vital, earnest, palpitating with youthful energy, preposterous in premises, precipitate in conclusions, — yet irresistible and convincing to every woman in their illogical sincerity. There was not a word of love in it, yet every page breathed a wholesome adoration; there was not an epithet or expression that a greater prude than Mrs. Ashwood would have objected to, yet every sentence seemed to end in a caress. There was not a line of poetry in it, and scarcely a figure or simile, and yet it was poetical. Boyishly egotistic as it was in attitude, it seemed to be written less *of* himself than *to* her; in its delicate because unconscious flattery, it made her at once the provocation and excuse. And yet so potent was its individuality that it required no signature. No one but John Milton Harcourt could have written it. His personality stood out of it so strongly that once or twice Mrs. Ashwood almost unconsciously put up her little hand before her face with a half-mischievous, half-deprecating smile, as if the big honest eyes of its writer were upon her.

It began by an elaborate apology for declining the appointment offered him by one of her friends, which he was bold enough to think had been prompted by her kind heart.

That was like her, but yet what she might do to any one; and he preferred to think of her as the sweet and gentle lady who had recognized his merit without knowing him, rather than the powerful and gracious benefactress who wanted to reward him when she did know him. The crown that she had all unconsciously placed upon his head that afternoon at the little hotel at Crystal Spring was more to him than the senator's appointment; perhaps he was selfish, but he could not bear that she who had given so much should believe that he could accept a lesser gift. All this and much more! Some of it he had wanted to say to her in San Francisco at times when they had met, but he could not find the words. But she had given him the courage to go on and do the only thing he was fit for, and he had resolved to stick to that, and perhaps do something once more that might make him hear again her voice as he had heard it that day, and again see the light that had shone in her eyes as she sat there and read. And this was why he was sending her a manuscript. She might have forgotten that she had told him a strange story of her cousin who had disappeared — which she thought he might at some time work up. Here it was. Perhaps she might not recognize it again, in the way he had written it here; perhaps she did not really mean it when she had given him permission to use it, but he remembered her truthful eyes and believed her — and in any event it was hers to do with what she liked. It had been a great pleasure for him to write it and think that she would see it; it was like seeing her himself — that was in *his better self* — more worthy the companionship of a beautiful and noble woman than the poor young man she would have helped. This was why he had not called the week before she went away. But for all that, she had made his life less lonely, and he should be ever grateful to her. He could never forget how she unconsciously sympathized with him that day over the loss that

had blighted his life forever, — yet even then he did not know that she, herself, had passed through the same suffering. But just here the stricken widow of thirty, after a vain attempt to keep up the knitted gravity of her eyebrows, bowed her dimpling face over the letter of the blighted widower of twenty, and laughed so long and silently that the tears stood out like dew on her light brown eyelashes.

But she became presently severe again, and finished her reading of the letter gravely. Then she folded it carefully, deposited it in a box on her table, which she locked. After a few minutes, however, she unlocked the box again and transferred the letter to her pocket. The serenity of her features did not relax again, although her previous pretty prepossession of youthful spirit was still indicated in her movements. Going into her bedroom, she reappeared in a few minutes with a light cloak thrown over her shoulders and a white-trimmed broad-brimmed hat. Then she rolled up the manuscript in a paper, and called her French maid. As she stood there awaiting her with the roll in her hand, she might have been some young girl on her way to her music lesson.

"If my brother returns before I do, tell him to wait."

"Madame is going"—

"Out," said Mrs. Ashwood blithely, and tripped downstairs.

She made her way directly to the shore where she remembered there was a group of rocks affording a shelter from the northwest trade-winds. It was reached at low water by a narrow ridge of sand, and here she had often basked in the sun with her book. It was here that she now unrolled John Milton's manuscript and read.

It was the story she had told him, but interpreted by his poetry and adorned by his fancy until the facts as she remembered them seemed to be no longer hers, or indeed

truths at all. She had always believed her cousin's unhappy temperament to have been the result of a moral and physical idiosyncrasy, — she found it here to be the effect of a lifelong and hopeless passion for herself! The ingenious John Milton had given a poet's precocity to the youth whom she had only known as a suspicious, moody boy, had idealized him as a sensitive but songless Byron, had given him the added infirmity of pulmonary weakness, and a handkerchief that in moments of great excitement, after having been hurriedly pressed to his pale lips, was withdrawn "with a crimson stain." Opposed to this interesting figure — the more striking to her as she had been hitherto haunted by the impression that her cousin during his boyhood had been subject to facial eruption and boils — was her own equally idealized self. Cruelly kind to her cousin and gentle with his weaknesses while calmly ignoring their cause, leading him unconsciously step by step in his fatal passion, he only became aware by accident that she nourished an ideal hero in the person of a hard, proud, middle-aged practical man of the world, — her future husband! At this picture of the late Mr. Ashwood, who had really been an indistinctive social *bon vivant*, his amiable relict grew somewhat hysterical. The discovery of her real feelings drove the consumptive cousin into a secret, self-imposed exile on the shores of the Pacific, where he hoped to find a grave. But the complete and sudden change of life and scene, the balm of the wild woods and the wholesome barbarism of nature, wrought a magical change in his physical health and a philosophical rest in his mind. He married the daughter of an Indian chief. Years passed, the heroine — a rich and still young and beautiful widow — unwittingly sought the same medicinal solitude. Here in the depth of the forest she encountered her former playmate; the passion which he had fondly supposed was dead revived in her presence, and for the first time she learned from his

bearded lips the secret of his passion. Alas! not *she* alone! The contiguous forest could not be bolted out, and the Indian wife heard all. Recognizing the situation with aboriginal directness of purpose, she committed suicide in the fond belief that it would reunite the survivors. But in vain; the cousins parted on the spot to meet no more.

Even Mrs. Ashwood's predilection for the youthful writer could not overlook the fact that the dénouement was by no means novel nor the situation human, but yet it was here that she was most interested and fascinated. The description of the forest was a description of the wood where she had first met Harcourt; the charm of it returned, until she almost seemed to again inhale its balsamic freshness in the pages before her. Now, as then, her youth came back with the same longing and regret. But more bewildering than all, it was herself that moved there, painted with the loving hand of the narrator. For the first time she experienced the delicious flattery of seeing herself as only a lover could see her. The smallest detail of her costume was suggested with an accuracy that pleasantly thrilled her feminine sense. The grace of her figure slowly moving through the shadow, the curves of her arm and the delicacy of her hand that held the bridle rein, the gentle glow of her softly rounded cheek, the sweet mystery of her veiled eyes and forehead, and the escaping gold of her lovely hair beneath her hat were all in turn masterfully touched or tenderly suggested. And when to this was added the faint perfume of her nearer presence — the scent she always used — the delicate revelations of her withdrawn gauntlet, the bracelet clasping her white wrist, and at last the thrilling contact of her soft hand on his arm, — she put down the manuscript and blushed like a very girl. Then she started.

A shout! — *his* voice surely! — and the sound of oars in their rowlocks.

An instant revulsion of feeling overtook her. With a

quick movement she instantly hid the manuscript beneath her cloak and stood up erect and indignant. Not twenty yards away, apparently advancing from the opposite shore of the bay, was a boat. It contained only John Milton, resting on his oars and scanning the group of rocks anxiously. His face, which was quite strained with anxiety, suddenly flushed when he saw her, and then recognizing the unmistakable significance of her look and attitude, paled once more. He bent over his oars again; a few strokes brought him close to the rock.

"I beg your pardon," he said hesitatingly, as he turned towards her and laid aside his oars, "but — I thought — you were — in danger."

She glanced quickly round her. She had forgotten the tide! The ledge between her and the shore was already a foot under brown sea-water. Yet if she had not thought that it would look ridiculous, she would have leaped down even then and waded ashore.

"It 's nothing," she said coldly, with the air of one to whom the situation was an every-day occurrence; "it 's only a few steps and a slight wetting — and my brother would have been here in a moment more."

John Milton's frank eyes made no secret of his mortification. "I ought not to have disturbed you, I know," he said quickly; "I had no right. But I was on the other shore opposite and I saw you come down here — that is" — he blushed prodigiously — "I thought it *might be* you — and I ventured — I mean — won't you let me row you ashore?"

There seemed to be no reasonable excuse for refusing. She slipped quickly into the boat without waiting for his helping hand, avoiding that contact which only a moment ago she was trying to recall.

A few strokes brought them ashore. He continued his explanation with the hopeless frankness and persistency of

youth and inexperience. "I only came here the day before yesterday. I would not have come, but Mr. Fletcher, who has a cottage on the other shore, sent for me to offer me my old place on the 'Clarion.' I had no idea of intruding upon your privacy by calling here without permission."

Mrs. Ashwood had resumed her conventional courtesy without, however, losing her feminine desire to make her companion pay for the agitation he had caused her. "We would have been always pleased to see you," she said vaguely, "and I hope, as you are here now, you will come with me to the hotel. My brother" —

But he still retained his hold of the boat-rope without moving, and continued, "I saw you yesterday, through the telescope, sitting in your balcony; and later at night I think it was your shadow I saw near the blue-shaded lamp in the sitting-room by the window, — I don't mean the *red lamp* that you have in your own room. I watched you until you put out the blue lamp and lit the red one. I tell you this — because — because — I thought you might be reading a manuscript I sent you. At least," he smiled faintly, "I *liked* to think it so."

In her present mood this struck her only as persistent and somewhat egotistical. But she felt herself now on ground where she could deal firmly with him.

"Oh yes," she said gravely. "I got it and thank you very much for it. I intended to write to you."

"Don't," he said, looking at her fixedly. "I can see you don't like it."

"On the contrary," she said promptly, "I think it beautifully written, and very ingenious in plot and situation. Of course it is n't the story I told you — I did n't expect that, for I 'm not a genius. The man is not at all like my cousin, you know, and the woman — well really, to tell the truth, *she* is simply inconceivable!"

"You think so?" he said gravely. He had been gaz-

ing abstractedly at some shining brown seaweed in the water, and when he raised his eyes to hers they seemed to have caught its color.

"Think so? I 'm positive! There 's no such a woman; she is n't *human.* But let us walk to the hotel."

"Thank you, but I must go back now."

"But at least let my brother thank you for taking his place — in rescuing me. It was so thoughtful in you to put off at once when you saw I was surrounded. I might have been in great danger."

"Please don't make fun of me, Mrs. Ashwood," he said, with a faint return of his boyish smile. "You know there was no danger. I have only interrupted you in a nap or a reverie — and I can see now that you evidently came here to be alone."

Holding the manuscript more closely hidden under the folds of her cloak, she smiled enigmatically. "I think I *did*, and it seems that the tide thought so too, and acted upon it. But you will come up to the hotel with me, surely?"

"No, I am going back now." There was a sudden firmness about the young fellow which she had never before noticed. This was evidently the creature who had married in spite of his family.

"Won't you come back long enough to take your manuscript? I will point out the part I refer to, and — we will talk it over."

"There is no necessity. I wrote to you that you might keep it; it is yours; it was written for you and none other. It is quite enough for me to know that you were good enough to read it. But will you do one thing more for me? Read it again! If you find anything in it the second time to change your views — if you find" —

"I will let you know," she said quickly. "I will write to you as I intended."

"No, I didn't mean that. I meant that if you found the woman less inconceivable and more human, don't write to me, but put your red lamp in your window instead of the blue one. I will watch for it and see it."

"I think I will be able to explain myself much better with simple pen and ink," she said dryly, "and it will be much more useful to you."

He lifted his hat gravely, shoved off the boat, leaped into it, and before she could hold out her hand was twenty feet away. She turned and ran quickly up the rocks. When she reached the hotel, she could see the boat already half across the bay.

Entering her sitting-room she found that her brother, tired of waiting for her, had driven out. Taking the hidden manuscript from her cloak she tossed it with a slight gesture of impatience on the table. Then she summoned the landlord.

"Is there a town across the bay?"

"No! the whole mountain-side belongs to Don Diego Fletcher. He lives away back in the Coast Range at Los Gatos, but he has a cottage and mill on the beach."

"Don Diego Fletcher! Is he a Spaniard then?"

"Half and half, I reckon; he 's from the lower country. I believe."

"Is he here often?"

"Not much; he has mills at Los Gatos, wheat ranches at Santa Clara, and owns a newspaper in 'Frisco! But he 's here now. There were lights in his house last night and his cutter lies off the point."

"Could you get a small package and note to him?"

"Certainly; it is only a row across the bay."

"Thank you."

Without removing her hat and cloak she sat down at the table and began a letter to Don Diego Fletcher. She begged to inclose to him a manuscript which she was satis-

fied, for the interests of its author, was better in his hands than hers. It had been given to her by the author, Mr. J. M. Harcourt, whom she understood was engaged on Mr. Fletcher's paper, the "Clarion." In fact, it had been written at *her* suggestion, and from an incident in real life of which she was cognizant. She was sorry to say that on account of some very foolish criticism of her own as to the *facts*, the talented young author had become so dissatisfied with it as to make it possible that, if left to himself, this very charming and beautifully written story would remain unpublished. As an admirer of Mr. Harcourt's genius, and a friend of his family, she felt that such an event would be deplorable, and she therefore begged to leave it to Mr. Fletcher's delicacy and tact to arrange with the author for its publication. She knew that Mr. Fletcher had only to read it to be convinced of its remarkable literary merit, and she again would impress upon him the fact that her playful and thoughtless criticism — which was personal and confidential — was only based upon the circumstances that the author had really made a more beautiful and touching story than the poor facts which she had furnished seemed to warrant. She had only just learned the fortunate circumstance that Mr. Fletcher was in the neighborhood of the hotel where she was staying with her brother.

With the same practical, businesslike directness, but perhaps a certain unbusinesslike haste superadded, she rolled up the manuscript and dispatched it with the letter.

This done, however, a slight reaction set in; and having taken off her hat and cloak, she dropped listlessly on a chair by the window, but as suddenly rose and took a seat in the darker part of the room. She felt that she had done right, — that highest but most depressing of human convictions! It was entirely for his good. There was no reason why his best interests should suffer for his folly. If

anybody was to suffer it was she. But what nonsense was she thinking! She would write to him later when she was a little cooler, — as she had said. But then he had distinctly told her, and very rudely too, that he did n't want her to write. Wanted her to make *signals* to him, — the idiot! and probably was even now watching her with a telescope. It was really too preposterous!

The result was that her brother found her on his return in a somewhat uncertain mood, and, as a counselor, variable and conflicting in judgment. If this Clementina, who seemed to have the family qualities of obstinacy and audacity, really cared for him, she certainly would n't let delicacy stand in the way of letting him know it — and he was therefore safe to wait a little. A few moments later, she languidly declared that she was afraid that she was no counselor in such matters; really she was getting too old to take any interest in that sort of thing, and she never had been a match-maker! By the way now, was n't it odd that this neighbor, that rich capitalist across the bay, should be called Fletcher, and "James Fletcher" too, for Diego meant "James" in Spanish. Exactly the same name as poor "Cousin Jim" who disappeared. Did he remember her old playmate Jim? But her brother thought something else was a deuced sight more odd, namely, that this same Don Diego Fletcher was said to be very sweet on Clementina now, and was always in her company at the Ramirez. And that, with this "Clarion" apology on the top of it, looked infernally queer.

Mrs. Ashwood felt a sudden consternation. Here had she — Jack's sister — just been taking Jack's probable rival into confidential correspondence! She turned upon Jack sharply: —

"Why did n't you say that before?"

"I did tell you," he said gloomily, "but you did n't listen. But what difference does it make to you now?"

"None whatever," said Mrs. Ashwood calmly, as she walked out of the room.

Nevertheless the afternoon passed wearily, and her usual ride into the upland cañon did not reanimate her. For reasons known best to herself she did not take her after-dinner stroll along the shore to watch the outlying fog. At a comparatively early hour, while there was still a roseate glow in the western sky, she appeared with grim deliberation, with the blue lamp-shade in her hand, and placed it over the lamp, which she lit and stood on her table beside the window. This done she sat down and began to write with bright-eyed but vicious complacency.

"But you don't want that light *and* the window, Constance," said Jack wonderingly.

Mrs. Ashwood could not stand the dreadful twilight.

"But take away your lamp, and you 'll have light enough from the sunset," responded Jack.

That was just what she did n't want! The light from the window was that horrid vulgar red glow which she hated. It might be very romantic and suit lovers like Jack; but as *she* had some work to do, she wanted the blue shade of the lamp to correct that dreadful glare.

CHAPTER XII

John Milton had rowed back without lifting his eyes to Mrs. Ashwood's receding figure. He believed that he was right in declining her invitation, although he had a miserable feeling that it entailed seeing her for the last time. With all that he believed was his previous experience of the affections, he was still so untutored as to be confused as to his reasons for declining, or his right to have been shocked and disappointed at her manner. It seemed to him sufficiently plain that he had offended the most perfect woman he had ever known without knowing more. The feeling he had for her was none the less powerful because, in his great simplicity, it was vague and unformulated. And it was a part of this strange simplicity that in his miserable loneliness his thoughts turned unconsciously to his dead wife for sympathy and consolation. Loo would have understood him!

Mr. Fletcher, who had received him on his arrival with singular effusiveness and cordiality, had put off their final arrangements until after dinner, on account of pressing business. It was, therefore, with some surprise that an hour before the time he was summoned to Fletcher's room. He was still more surprised to find him sitting at his desk, from which a number of business papers and letters had been hurriedly thrust aside to make way for a manuscript. A single glance at it was enough to show the unhappy John Milton that it was the one he had sent to Mrs. Ashwood. The color flushed to his cheek, and he felt a mist before his eyes. His employer's face, on the contrary, was quite

pale, and his eyes were fixed on Harcourt with a singular intensity. His voice too, although under great control, was hard and strange.

"Read that," he said, handing the young man a letter.

The color again streamed into John Milton's face as he recognized the hand of Mrs. Ashwood, and remained there while he read it. When he put it down, however, he raised his frank eyes to Fletcher's, and said, with a certain dignity and manliness, "What she says is the truth, sir. But it is *I* alone who am at fault. This manuscript is merely *my* stupid idea of a very simple story she was once kind enough to tell me when we were talking of strange occurrences in real life, which she thought I might some time make use of in my work. I tried to embellish it, and failed. That 's all. I will take it back, — it was written only for her."

There was such an irresistible truthfulness and sincerity in his voice and manner, that any idea of complicity with the sender was dismissed from Fletcher's mind. As Harcourt, however, extended his hand for the manuscript, Fletcher interfered.

"You forget that you gave it to her, and she has sent it to me. If *I* don't keep it, it can be returned to her only. Now may I ask who is this lady who takes such an interest in your literary career? Have you known her long? Is she a friend of your family?"

The slight sneer that accompanied his question restored the natural color to the young man's face, but kindled his eye ominously.

"No," he said briefly. "I met her accidentally about two months ago and as accidentally found out that she had taken an interest in one of the first things I ever wrote for your paper. She neither knew you nor me. It was then that she told me this story; she did not even then know

who I was, though she had met some of my family. She was very good and has generously tried to help me."

Fletcher's eyes remained fixed upon him.

"But this tells me only *what* she is, not *who* she is."

"I am afraid you must inquire of her brother, Mr. Shipley," said Harcourt curtly.

"Shipley?"

"Yes; he is traveling with her for his health, and they are going south when the rains come. They are wealthy Philadelphians, I believe, and — and she is a widow."

Fletcher picked up her note and glanced again at the signature, "Constance Ashwood." There was a moment of silence, when he resumed in quite a different voice, "It 's odd I never met them nor they me."

As he seemed to be waiting for a response, John Milton said simply, "I suppose it 's because they have not been here long, and are somewhat reserved."

Mr. Fletcher laid aside the manuscript and letter, and took up his apparently suspended work.

"When you see this Mrs. — Mrs. Ashwood again, you might say" —

"I shall not see her again," interrupted John Milton hastily.

Mr. Fletcher shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said, with a peculiar smile, "I will write to her. Now, Mr. Harcourt," he continued, with a sudden business brevity, "if you please, we 'll drop this affair and attend to the matter for which I just summoned you. Since yesterday an important contract for which I have been waiting is concluded, and its performance will take me East at once. I have made arrangements that you will be left in the literary charge of the 'Clarion.' It is only a fitting recompense that the paper owes to you and your father, — to whom I hope to see you presently reconciled. But we won't discuss that now! As my affairs take me back to

Los Gatos within half an hour, I am sorry I cannot dispense my hospitality in person, — but you will dine and sleep here to-night. Good-by. As you go out, will you please send up Mr. Jackson to me." He nodded briefly, seemed to plunge instantly into his papers again, and John Milton was glad to withdraw.

The shock he had felt at Mrs. Ashwood's frigid disposition of his wishes and his manuscript had benumbed him to any enjoyment or appreciation of the change in his fortune. He wandered out of the house and descended to the beach in a dazed, bewildered way, seeing only the words of her letter to Fletcher before him, and striving to grasp some other meaning from them than their coldly practical purport. Perhaps this was her cruel revenge for his telling her not to write to him. Could she not have divined it was only his fear of what she might say! And now it was all over! She had washed her hands of him with the sending of that manuscript and letter, and he would pass out of her memory as a foolish, conceited ingrate, — perhaps a figure as wearily irritating and stupid to her as the cousin she had known. He mechanically lifted his eyes to the distant hotel; the glow was still in the western sky, but the blue lamp was already shining in the window. His cheek flushed quickly, and he turned away as if she could have seen his face. Yes — she despised him, and *that* was his answer!

When he returned, Mr. Fletcher had gone. He dragged through a dinner with Mr. Jackson, Fletcher's secretary, and tried to realize his good fortune in listening to the subordinate's congratulations. "But I thought," said Jackson, "you had slipped up on your luck to-day when the old man sent for you. He was quite white, and ready to rip out about something that had just come in. I suppose it was one of those anonymous things against your father, — the old man 's dead-set against 'em now." But John

Milton heard him vaguely, and presently excused himself for a row on the moonlit bay.

The active exertion, with intervals of placid drifting along the landlocked shore, somewhat soothed him. The heaving Pacific beyond was partly hidden in a low creeping fog, but the curving bay was softly radiant. The rocks whereon she sat that morning, the hotel where she was now quietly reading, were outlined in black and silver. In this dangerous contiguity it seemed to him that her presence returned, — not the woman who had met him so coldly; who had penned those lines; the woman from whom he was now parting forever, but the blameless ideal he had worshiped from the first, and which he now felt could never pass out of his life again! He recalled their long talks, their rarer rides and walks in the city; her quick appreciation and ready sympathy; her pretty curiosity and half-maternal consideration of his foolish youthful past; even the playful way in which she sometimes seemed to make herself younger as if better to understand him. Lingering at times in the shadow of the headland, he fancied he saw the delicate nervous outlines of her face near his own again; the faint shading of her brown lashes, the soft intelligence of her gray eyes. Drifting idly in the placid moonlight, pulling feverishly across the swell of the channel, or lying on his oars in the shallows of the rocks, but always following the curves of the bay, like a bird circling around a lighthouse, it was far in the night before he at last dragged his boat upon the sand. Then he turned to look once more at her distant window. He would be away in the morning, and he should never see it again! It was very late, but the blue light seemed to be still burning unalterably and inflexibly.

But even as he gazed, a change came over it. A shadow seemed to pass before the blind; the blue shade was lifted; for an instant he could see the colorless starlike point of

the light itself show clearly. It was over now; she was putting out the light. Suddenly he held his breath! A roseate glow gradually suffused the window like a burning blush; the curtain was drawn aside, and the red lamp-shade gleamed out surely and steadily into the darkness.

Transfigured and breathless in the moonlight, John Milton gazed on it. It seemed to him the dawn of Love!

CHAPTER XIII

The winter rains had come. But so plenteously and persistently, and with such fateful preparation of circumstance, that the long-looked-for blessing presently became a wonder, an anxiety, and at last a slowly widening terror. Before a month had passed every mountain, stream, and watercourse, surcharged with the melted snows of the Sierras, had become a great tributary; every tributary a great river, until, pouring their great volume into the engorged channels of the American and Sacramento rivers, they overleaped their banks and became as one vast inland sea. Even to a country already familiar with broad and striking catastrophe, the flood was a phenomenal one. For days the sullen overflow lay in the valley of the Sacramento, enormous, silent, currentless — except where the surplus waters rolled through Carquinez Straits, San Francisco Bay, and the Golden Gate, and reappeared as the vanished Sacramento River, in an outflowing stream of fresh and turbid water fifty miles at sea.

Across the vast inland expanse, brooded over by a leaden sky, leaden rain fell, dimpling like shot the sluggish pools of the flood; a cloudy chaos of fallen trees, drifting barns and outhouses, wagons and agricultural implements, moved over the surface of the waters, or circled slowly around the outskirts of forests that stood ankle-deep in ooze and the current, which in serried phalanx they resisted still. As night fell these forms became still more vague and chaotic, and were interspersed with the scattered lanterns and flaming torches of relief-boats, or occasionally the high terraced

gleaming windows of the great steamboats, feeling their way along the lost channel. At times the opening of a furnace door shot broad bars of light across the sluggish stream and into the branches of dripping and drift-encumbered trees; at times the looming smoke-stacks sent out a pent-up breath of sparks that illuminated the inky chaos for a moment, and then fell as black and dripping rain. Or perhaps a hoarse shout from some faintly outlined bulk on either side brought a quick response from the relief-boats, and the detaching of a canoe with a blazing pine-knot in its bow into the outer darkness.

It was late in the afternoon when Lawrence Grant, from the deck of one of the larger tugs, sighted what had been once the estuary of Sidon Creek. The leader of a party of scientific observation and relief, he had kept a tireless watch of eighteen hours, keenly noticing the work of devastation, the changes in the channel, the prospects of abatement, and the danger that still threatened. He had passed down the length of the submerged Sacramento valley, through the straits of Carquinez, and was now steaming along the shores of the upper reaches of San Francisco Bay. Everywhere the same scene of desolation, — vast stretches of tule land, once broken up by cultivation and dotted with dwellings, now clearly erased on that watery chart; long lines of symmetrical perspective, breaking the monotonous level, showing orchards buried in the flood; Indian mounds and natural eminences covered with cattle or hastily erected camps; half-submerged houses, whose solitary chimneys, however, still gave signs of an undaunted life within; isolated groups of trees, with their lower branches heavy with the unwholesome fruit of the flood, in wisps of hay and straw, rakes and pitchforks, or pathetically sheltering some shivering and forgotten household pet. But everywhere the same dull, expressionless, placid tranquillity of destruction, — a horrible leveling of all things in

one bland smiling equality of surface, beneath which agony, despair, and ruin were deeply buried and forgotten; a catastrophe without convulsion, — a devastation voiceless, passionless, and supine.

The boat had slowed up before what seemed to be a collection of disarranged houses with the current flowing between lines that indicated the existence of thoroughfares and streets. Many of the lighter wooden buildings were huddled together on the street corners with their gables to the flow; some appeared as if they had fallen on their knees, and others lay complacently on their sides, like the houses of a child's toy village. An elevator still lifted itself above the other warehouses; from the centre of an enormous square pond, once the plaza, still arose a "Liberty pole," or flagstaff, which now supported a swinging lantern, and in the distance appeared the glittering dome of some public building. Grant recognized the scene at once. It was all that was left of the invincible youth of Tasajara!

As this was an objective point of the scheme of survey and relief for the district, the boat was made fast to the second story of one of the warehouses. It was now used as a general store and dépôt, and bore a singular resemblance in its interior to Harcourt's grocery at Sidon. This suggestion was the more fatefully indicated by the fact that half a dozen men were seated around a stove in the centre, more or less given up to a kind of philosophical and lazy enjoyment of their enforced idleness. And when to this was added the more surprising coincidence that the party consisted of Billings, Peters, and Wingate, — former residents of Sidon and first citizens of Tasajara, — the resemblance was complete.

They were ruined, — but they accepted their common fate with a certain Indian stoicism and Western sense of humor that for the time lifted them above the vulgar complacency of their former fortunes. There was a deep-seated,

if coarse and irreverent resignation in their philosophy. At the beginning of the calamity it had been roughly formulated by Billings in the statement that "it was n't anybody's fault; there was nobody to kill, and what could n't be reached by a Vigilance Committee there was no use resolootin' over." When the Reverend Doctor Pilsbury had suggested an appeal to a Higher Power, Peters had replied good humoredly that "a Creator who could fool around with them in that style was above being interfered with by prayer." At first the calamity had been a thing to fight against; then it became a practical joke, the sting of which was lost in the victims' power of endurance and assumed ignorance of its purport. There was something almost pathetic in their attempts to understand its peculiar humor.

"How about that Europ-e-an trip o' yours, Peters?" said Billings meditatively, from the depths of his chair. "Looks as if those Crowned Heads over there would have to wait till the water goes down considerable afore you kin trot out your wife and darters before 'em!"

"Yes," said Peters, "it rather pints that way; and ez far ez I kin see, Mame Billings ain't goin' to no Saratoga, neither, this year."

"Reckon the boys won't hang about old Harcourt's Free Library to see the girls home from lectures and singing-class much this year," said Wingate. "Wonder if Harcourt ever thought o' this the day he opened it, and made that rattlin' speech o' his about the new property? Clark says everything built on that made ground has got to go after the water falls. Rough on Harcourt after all his other losses, eh? He oughter have closed up with that scientific chap, Grant, and married him to Clementina while the big boom was on" —

"Hush!" said Peters, indicating Grant, who had just entered quietly.

"Don't mind me, gentlemen," said Grant, stepping

towards the group with a grave but perfectly collected face; "on the contrary, I am very anxious to hear all the news of Harcourt's family. I left for New York before the rainy season, and have only just got back."

His speech and manner appeared to be so much in keeping with the prevailing grim philosophy that Billings, after a glance at the others, went on. "Ef you left afore the first rains," said he, "you must have left only the steamer ahead of Fletcher, when he run off with Clementina Harcourt, and you might have come across them on their wedding trip in New York."

Not a muscle of Grant's face changed under their eager and cruel scrutiny. "No, I didn't," he returned quietly. "But why did she run away? Did the father object to Fletcher? If I remember rightly he was rich and a good match."

"Yes, but I reckon the old man hadn't quite got over the 'Clarion' abuse, for all its eating humble-pie and taking back its yarns of him. And maybe he might have thought the engagement rather sudden. They say that she 'd only met Fletcher the day afore the engagement."

"That be d—d," said Peters, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and startling the lazy resignation of his neighbors by taking his feet from the stove and sitting upright. "I tell ye, gentlemen, I 'm sick o' this sort o' hogwash that 's been ladled round to us. That gal Clementina Harcourt and that feller Fletcher had met not only once, but *many* times afore — yes! they were old friends, if it comes to that, a matter of six years ago."

Grant's eyes were fixed eagerly on the speaker, although the others scarcely turned their heads.

"You know, gentlemen," said Peters, "I never took stock in this yer story of the drownin' of 'Lige Curtis. Why? Well, if you wanter know — in my opinion — there never was any 'Lige Curtis!"

Billings lifted his head with difficulty; Wingate turned his face to the speaker.

"There never was a scrap o' paper ever found in his cabin with the name o' 'Lige Curtis on it; there never was any inquiry made for 'Lige Curtis; there never was any sorrowin' friends comin' after 'Lige Curtis. For why? — There never was any 'Lige Curtis. The man who passed himself off in Sidon under that name — was that man Fletcher. That 's how he knew all about Harcourt's title; that 's how he got his best holt on Harcourt. And he did it all to get Clementina Harcourt, whom the old man had refused to him in Sidon."

A grunt of incredulity passed around the circle. Such is the fate of historical innovation! Only Grant listened attentively.

"Ye ought to tell that yarn to John Milton," said Wingate ironically; "it 's about in the style o' them stories he slings in the 'Clarion.'"

"He 's made a good thing outer that job. Wonder what he gets for them?" said Peters.

It was Billings's time to rise, and, under the influence of some strong cynical emotion, to even rise to his feet. "Gets for 'em! — *gets* for 'em! I 'll tell you *what* he gets for 'em! It beats this story o' Peters's, — it beats the flood. It beats me! Ye know that boy, gentlemen; ye know how he uster lie round his father's store, reading flapdoodle stories and sich! Ye remember how I uster try to give him good examples and knock some sense into him? Ye remember how, after his father's good luck, he spiled all his own chances, and ran off with his father's waiter gal — all on account o' them flapdoodle books he read? Ye remember how he sashayed round newspaper offices in 'Frisco until he could write a flapdoodle story himself? Ye wanter know what he gets for 'em. I 'll tell you. He got an interduction to one of them high-toned, highfalutin',

don't-touch-me' rich widders from Philadelfy, — that 's what he gets for 'em! He got her dead-set on him and his stories, — that 's what he gets for 'em! He got her to put him up with Fletcher in the 'Clarion,' — that 's what he gets for 'em. And darn my skin! — ef what they say is true, while we hard-working men are sittin' here like drowned rats — that 'ere John Milton, ez never did a stitch o' live work like me 'n' yere; ez never did anythin' but spin yarns about *us* ez did *work*, is now 'gittin' for 'em' — what? Guess! Why, he 's gittin' *the rich widder herself* and *half a million dollars with her!* Gentlemen! lib'ty is a good thing — but thar 's some things ye gets too much lib'ty of in this country — and that 's this yer LIB'TY OF THE PRESS!"

THE POSTMISTRESS OF LAUREL RUN

CHAPTER I

The mail-stage had just passed Laurel Run, — so rapidly that the whirling cloud of dust dragged with it down the steep grade from the summit hung over the level long after the stage had vanished, and then, drifting away, slowly sifted a red precipitate over the hot platform of the Laurel Run post-office.

Out of this cloud presently emerged the neat figure of the postmistress with the mail-bag which had been dexterously flung at her feet from the top of the passing vehicle. A dozen loungers eagerly stretched out their hands to assist her, but the warning, "It 's agin the rules, boys, for any but her to touch it," from a bystander, and a coquettish shake of the head from the postmistress herself — much more effective than any official interdict — withheld them. The bag was not heavy, — Laurel Run was too recent a settlement to have attracted much correspondence, — and the young woman, having pounced upon her prey with a certain feline instinct, dragged it, not without difficulty, behind the partitioned inclosure in the office, and locked the door. Her pretty face, momentarily visible through the window, was slightly flushed with the exertion, and the loose ends of her fair hair, wet with perspiration, curled themselves over her forehead into tantalizing little rings. But the window-shutter was quickly closed, and this momentary but charming vision withdrawn from the waiting public.

"Guv'ment oughter have more sense than to make a

woman pick mail-bags outer the road," said Jo Simmons sympathetically. "'T ain't in her day's work, anyhow; guv'ment oughter hand 'em over to her like a lady; it 's rich enough and ugly enough."

"'T ain't guv'ment; it 's that stage company's airs and graces," interrupted a newcomer. "They think it mighty fine to go beltin' by, makin' everybody take their dust, just because *stoppin'* ain't in their contract. Why, if that expressman who chucked down the bag had any feelin's for a lady" — but he stopped here at the amused faces of his auditors.

"Guess you don't know much o' that expressman's feelin's, stranger," said Simmons grimly. "Why, you oughter see him just nussin' that bag like a baby as he comes tearin' down the grade, and then rise up and sorter heave it to Mrs. Baker ez if it was a five-dollar bokay! His feelin's for her! Why, he 's give himself so dead away to her that we 're looking for him to forget what he 's doin' next, and just come sailin' down hisself at her feet."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the partition, Mrs. Baker had brushed the red dust from the padlocked bag, and removed what seemed to be a supplementary package attached to it by a wire. Opening it she found a handsome scent-bottle, evidently a superadded gift from the devoted expressman. This she put aside with a slight smile and the murmured word, "Foolishness." But when she had unlocked the bag, even its sacred interior was also profaned by a covert parcel from the adjacent postmaster at Burnt Ridge, containing a gold "specimen" brooch and some circus tickets. It was laid aside with the other. This also was vanity and — presumably — vexation of spirit.

There were seventeen letters in all, of which five were for herself — and yet the proportion was small that morning. Two of them were marked "Official Business," and were promptly put by with feminine discernment, but in

another compartment than that holding the presents. Then the shutter was opened, and the task of delivery commenced.

It was accompanied with a social peculiarity that had in time become a habit of Laurel Run. As the young woman delivered the letters, in turn, to the men who were patiently drawn up in Indian file, she made that simple act a medium of privileged but limited conversation on special or general topics, — gay or serious as the case might be, or the temperament of the man suggested. That it was almost always of a complimentary character on their part may be readily imagined; but it was invariably characterized by an element of refined restraint, and, whether from some implied understanding or individual sense of honor, it never passed the bounds of conventionality or a certain delicacy of respect. The delivery was consequently more or less protracted, but when each man had exchanged his three or four minutes' conversation with the fair postmistress, — a conversation at times impeded by bashfulness or timidity, on his part solely, or restricted often to vague smiling, — he resignedly made way for the next. It was a formal levee, mitigated by the informality of rustic tact, great good humor, and infinite patience, and would have been amusing had it not always been terribly in earnest and at times touching. For it was peculiar to the place and the epoch, and indeed implied the whole history of Mrs. Baker.

She was the wife of John Baker, foreman of "The Last Chance," now for a year lying dead under half a mile of crushed and beaten-in tunnel at Burnt Ridge. There had been a sudden outcry from the depths at high hot noontide one day, and John had rushed from his cabin — his young, foolish, flirting wife clinging to him — to answer that despairing cry of his imprisoned men. There was one exit that he alone knew which might be yet held open, among falling walls and tottering timbers, long enough to set them

free. For one moment only the strong man hesitated between her entreating arms and his brothers' despairing cry. But she rose suddenly with a pale face, and said, "Go, John; I will wait for you here." He went, the men were freed — but she had waited for him ever since!

Yet in the shock of the calamity and in the after struggles of that poverty which had come to the ruined camp she had scarcely changed. But the men had. Although she was to all appearances the same giddy, pretty Betsy Baker, who had been so disturbing to the younger members, they seemed to be no longer disturbed by her. A certain subdued awe and respect, as if the martyred spirit of John Baker still held his arm around her, appeared to have come upon them all. They held their breath as this pretty woman, whose brief mourning had not seemed to affect her cheerfulness or even playfulness of spirit, passed before them. But she stood by her cabin and the camp — the only woman in a settlement of forty men — during the darkest hours of their fortune. Helping them to wash and cook, and ministering to their domestic needs, the sanctity of her cabin was, however, always kept as inviolable as if it had been *his* tomb. No one exactly knew why, for it was only a tacit instinct; but even one or two who had not scrupled to pay court to Betsy Baker during John Baker's life shrank from even a suggestion of familiarity towards the woman who had said that she would "wait for him there."

When brighter days came and the settlement had increased by one or two families, and laggard capital had been hurried up to relieve the still beleaguered and locked-up wealth of Burnt Ridge, the needs of the community and the claims of the widow of John Baker were so well told in political quarters that the post-office of Laurel Run was created expressly for her. Every man participated in the building of the pretty yet substantial edifice — the only

public building of Laurel Run — that stood in the dust of the great highway, half a mile from the settlement. There she was installed for certain hours of the day, for she could not be prevailed upon to abandon John's cabin, and here, with all the added respect due to a public functionary, she was secure in her privacy.

But the blind devotion of Laurel Run to John Baker's relict did not stop here. In its zeal to assure the government authorities of the necessity for a post-office, and to secure a permanent competency to the postmistress, there was much embarrassing extravagance. During the first week the sale of stamps at Laurel Run post-office was unprecedented in the annals of the Department. Fancy prices were given for the first issue; then they were bought wildly, recklessly, unprofitably, and on all occasions. Complimentary congratulation at the little window invariably ended with "and a dollar's worth of stamps, Mrs. Baker." It was felt to be supremely delicate to buy only the highest priced stamps, without reference to their adequacy; then mere *quantity* was sought; then outgoing letters were all over-paid and stamped in outrageous proportion to their weight and even size. The imbecility of this and its probable effect on the reputation of Laurel Run at the General Post-Office, being pointed out by Mrs. Baker, stamps were adopted as local currency, and even for decorative purposes on mirrors and the walls of cabins. Everybody wrote letters, with the result, however, that those *sent* were ludicrously and suspiciously in excess of those received. To obviate this, select parties made forced journeys to Hickory Hill, the next post-office, with letters and circulars addressed to themselves at Laurel Run. How long the extravagance would have continued is not known, but it was not until it was rumored that, in consequence of this excessive flow of business, the Department had concluded that a post*master* would be better fitted for the place

that it abated, and a compromise was effected with the General Office by a permanent salary to the postmistress.

Such was the history of Mrs. Baker, who had just finished her afternoon levee, nodded a smiling "good-by" to her last customer, and closed her shutter again. Then she took up her own letters, but before reading them, glanced, with a pretty impatience, at the two official envelopes addressed to herself, which she had shelved. They were generally a "lot of new rules," or notifications, or "absurd" questions which had nothing to do with Laurel Run and only bothered her and "made her head ache," and she had usually referred them to her admiring neighbor at Hickory Hill for explanation, who had generally returned them to her with the brief indorsement, "Purp stuff, don't bother," or, "Hogwash, let it slide." She remembered now that he had not returned the last two. With knitted brows and a slight pout she put aside her private correspondence and tore open the first one. It referred with official curtness to an unanswered communication of the previous week, and was "compelled to remind her of rule 47." Again those horrid rules! She opened the other; the frown deepened on her brow, and became fixed.

It was a summary of certain valuable money-letters that had miscarried on the route, and of which they had given her previous information. For a moment her cheeks blazed. How dare they; what did they mean! Her waybills and register were always right; she knew the names of every man, woman, and child in her district; no such names as those borne by the missing letters had ever existed at Laurel Run; no such addresses had ever been sent from Laurel Run post-office. It was a mean insinuation! She would send in her resignation at once! She would get "the boys" to write an insulting letter to Senator Slocumb, — Mrs. Baker had the feminine idea of government as a purely personal institution, — and she would find out who

it was that had put them up to this prying, crawling impudence! It was probably that wall-eyed old wife of the postmaster at Heavy Tree Crossing, who was jealous of her. "Remind her of their previous unanswered communication," indeed! Where was that communication, anyway? She remembered she had sent it to her admirer at Hickory Hill. Odd that he had n't answered it. Of course, he knew about this meanness — could he, too, have dared to suspect her! The thought turned her crimson again. He, Stanton Green, was an old "Laurel Runner," a friend of John's, a little "triflin'" and "presoomin'," but still an old loyal pioneer of the camp! "Why had n't he spoke up?"

There was the soft, muffled fall of a horse's hoof in the thick dust of the highway, the jingle of dismounting spurs, and a firm tread on the platform. No doubt one of the boys returning for a few supplemental remarks under the feeble pretense of forgotten stamps. It had been done before, and she had resented it as "cayotin' round;" but now she was eager to pour out her wrongs to the first comer. She had her hand impulsively on the door of the partition, when she stopped with a new sense of her impaired dignity. Could she confess this to her worshipers? But here the door opened in her very face, and a stranger entered.

He was a man of fifty, compactly and strongly built. A squarely cut goatee, slightly streaked with gray, fell straight from his thin-lipped but handsome mouth; his eyes were dark, humorous, yet searching. But the distinctive quality that struck Mrs. Baker was the blending of urban ease with frontier frankness. He was evidently a man who had seen cities and knew countries as well. And while he was dressed with the comfortable simplicity of a Californian mounted traveler, her inexperienced but feminine eye detected the keynote of his respectability in the carefully tied bow of his cravat. The Sierrean throat was apt to be open, free, and unfettered.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Baker," he said pleasantly, with his hat already in his hand. "I 'm Harry Home, of San Francisco." As he spoke his eye swept approvingly over the neat inclosure, the primly tied papers, and well-kept pigeonholes; the pot of flowers on her desk; her china-silk mantle and killing little chip hat and ribbons hanging against the wall; thence to her own pink, flushed face, bright blue eyes, tendriled clinging hair, and then — fell upon the leathern mail-bag still lying across the table. Here it became fixed on the unfortunate wire of the amorous expressman that yet remained hanging from the brass wards of the lock, and he reached his hand toward it.

But little Mrs. Baker was before him, and had seized it in her arms. She had been too preoccupied and bewildered to resent his first intrusion behind the partition, but this last familiarity with her sacred official property — albeit empty — capped the climax of her wrongs.

"How dare you touch it!" she said indignantly. "How dare you come in here! Who are you, anyway? Go outside, at once!"

The stranger fell back with an amused, deprecatory gesture, and a long silent laugh. "I 'm afraid you don't know me, after all!" he said pleasantly. "I 'm Harry Home, the Department Agent from the San Francisco office. My note of advice, No. 201, with my name on the envelope, seems to have miscarried too."

Even in her fright and astonishment it flashed upon Mrs. Baker that she had sent that notice, too, to Hickory Hill. But with it all the feminine secretive instinct within her was now thoroughly aroused, and she kept silent.

"I ought to have explained," he went on smilingly; "but you are quite right, Mrs. Baker," he added, nodding towards the bag. "As far as you knew, I had no business to go near it. Glad to see you know how to defend Uncle Sam's property so well. I was only a bit puzzled to

know," pointing to the wire, "if that thing was on the bag when it was delivered to you?"

Mrs. Baker saw no reason to conceal the truth. After all, this official was a man like the others, and it was just as well that he should understand her power. "It 's only the expressman's foolishness," she said, with a slightly coquettish toss of her head. "He thinks it smart to tie some nonsense on that bag with the wire when he flings it down."

Mr. Home, with his eyes on her pretty face, seemed to think it a not inhuman or unpardonable folly. "As long as he does n't meddle with the inside of the bag, I suppose you must put up with it," he said laughingly. A dreadful recollection, that the Hickory Hill postmaster had used the inside of the bag to convey *his* foolishness, came across her. It would never do to confess it now. Her face must have shown some agitation, for the official resumed with a half-paternal, half-reassuring air: "But enough of this. Now, Mrs. Baker, to come to my business here. Briefly, then, it does n't concern you in the least, except so far as it may relieve you and some others, whom the Department knows equally well, from a certain responsibility, and, perhaps, anxiety. We are pretty well posted down there in all that concerns Laurel Run, and I think," with a slight bow, "we 've known all about you and John Baker. My only business here is to take your place to-night in receiving the Omnibus Way Bag, that you know arrives here at 9.30, does n't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Baker hurriedly; "but it never has anything for us, except" — she caught herself up quickly, with a stammer, as she remembered the sighing Green's occasional offerings — "except a notification from Hickory Hill post-office. It leaves there," she went on with an affectation of precision, "at half past eight exactly, and it 's about an hour's run — seven miles by road."

"Exactly," said Mr. Home. "Well, *I* will receive the bag, open it, and dispatch it again. You can, if you choose, take a holiday."

"But," said Mrs. Baker, as she remembered that Laurel Run always made a point of attending her evening levee on account of the superior leisure it offered, "there are the people who come for letters, you know."

"I thought you said there were no letters at that time," said Mr. Home quickly.

"No — but — but" — with a slight hysterical stammer — "the boys come all the same."

"Oh!" said Mr. Home dryly.

"And — O Lord!" — But here the spectacle of the possible discomfiture of Laurel Run at meeting the bearded face of Mr. Home, instead of her own smooth cheeks, at the window, combined with her nervous excitement, overcame her so that, throwing her little frilled apron over her head, she gave way to a paroxysm of hysterical laughter. Mr. Home waited with amused toleration for it to stop, and when she had recovered, resumed: —

"Now, I should like to refer an instant to my first communication to you. Have you got it handy?"

Mrs. Baker's face fell. "No; I sent it over to Mr. Green, of Hickory Hill, for information."

"What!"

Terrified at the sudden seriousness of the man's voice, she managed to gasp out, however, that, after her usual habit, she had not opened the official letters, but had sent them to her more experienced colleague for advice and information; that she never could understand them herself, — they made her head ache, and interfered with her other duties, — but *he* understood them, and sent her word what to do. Remembering also his usual style of indorsement, she grew red again.

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing; he did n't return them."

"Naturally," said Mr. Home, with a peculiar expression. After a few moments' silent stroking of his beard, he suddenly faced the frightened woman.

"You oblige me, Mrs. Baker, to speak more frankly to you than I had intended. You have — unwittingly, I believe — given information to a man whom the government suspects of peculation. You have, without knowing it, warned the postmaster at Hickory Hill that he is suspected; and as you might have frustrated our plans for tracing a series of embezzlements to their proper source, you will see that you might have also done great wrong to yourself as his only neighbor and the next responsible person. In plain words, we have traced the disappearance of money-letters to a point when it lies between these two offices. Now, I have not the least hesitation in telling you that we do not suspect Laurel Run, and never have suspected it. Even the result of your thoughtless act, although it warned him, confirms our suspicion of his guilt. As to the warning, it has failed, or he has grown reckless, for another letter has been missed since. To-night, however, will settle all doubt in the matter. When I open that bag in this office to-night, and do not find a certain decoy letter in it, which was last checked at Heavy Tree Crossing, I shall know that it remains in Green's possession at Hickory Hill."

She was sitting back in her chair, white and breathless. He glanced at her kindly, and then took up his hat. "Come, Mrs. Baker, don't let this worry you. As I told you at first, *you* have nothing to fear. Even your thoughtlessness and ignorance of rules have contributed to show your own innocence. Nobody will ever be the wiser for this; we do not advertise our affairs in the Department. Not a soul but yourself knows the real cause of my visit here. I will leave you here alone for a while, so as to divert any suspicion. You will come, as usual, this even-

ing, and be seen by your friends; I will only be here when the bag arrives, to open it. Good-by, Mrs. Baker; it 's a nasty bit of business, but it 's all in the day's work. I 've seen worse, and, thank God! you 're out of it."

She heard his footsteps retreat into the outer office and die out of the platform; the jingle of his spurs, and the hollow beat of his horse's hoofs that seemed to find a dull echo in her own heart, and she was alone.

The room was very hot and very quiet; she could hear the warping and creaking of the shingles under the relaxing of the nearly level sunbeams. The office clock struck seven. In the breathless silence that followed a woodpecker took up his interrupted work on the roof, and seemed to beat out monotonously on her ear the last words of the stranger: Stanton Green — a thief! Stanton Green, one of the "boys" John had helped out of the falling tunnel! Stanton Green, whose old mother in the States still wrote letters to him at Laurel Run, in a few hours to be a disgraced and ruined man forever! She remembered now, as a thoughtless woman remembers, tales of his extravagance and fast living, of which she had taken no heed, and, with a sense of shame, of presents sent her, that she now clearly saw must have been far beyond his means. What would the boys say? What would John have said? Ah! what would John have *done!*

She started suddenly to her feet, white and cold as on that day that she had parted from John Baker before the tunnel. She put on her hat and mantle, and going to that little iron safe that stood in the corner, unlocked it and took out its entire contents of gold and silver. She had reached the door when another idea seized her, and opening her desk she collected her stamps to the last sheet, and hurriedly rolled them up under her cape. Then with a glance at the clock, and a rapid survey of the road from the platform, she slipped from it, and seemed to be swallowed up in the waiting woods beyond.

CHAPTER II

Once within the friendly shadows of the long belt of pines, Mrs. Baker kept them until she had left the limited settlement of Laurel Run far to the right, and came upon an open slope of Burnt Ridge, where she knew Jo Simmons' mustang, Blue Lightning, would be quietly feeding. She had often ridden him before, and when she had detached the fifty-foot riata from his head-stall, he permitted her the further recognized familiarity of twining her fingers in his bluish mane and climbing on his back. The tool-shed of Burnt Ridge Tunnel, where Jo's saddle and bridle always hung, was but a canter farther on. She reached it unperceived, and — another trick of the old days — quickly extemporized a side-saddle from Simmons' Mexican tree, with its high cantle and horn bow, and the aid of a blanket. Then leaping to her seat, she rapidly threw off her mantle, tied it by its sleeves around her waist, tucked it under one knee, and let it fall over her horse's flanks. By this time Blue Lightning was also struck with a flash of equine recollection and pricked up his ears. Mrs. Baker uttered a little chirping cry which he remembered, and the next moment they were both careering over the Ridge.

The trail that she had taken, though precipitate, difficult, and dangerous in places, was a clear gain of two miles on the stage road. There was less chance of her being followed or meeting any one. The greater cañons were already in shadow; the pines on the farther ridges were separating their masses, and showing individual silhouettes

against the sky, but the air was still warm, and the cool breath of night, as she well knew it, had not yet begun to flow down the mountain. The lower range of Burnt Ridge was still uneclipsed by the creeping shadow of the mountain ahead of her. Without a watch, but with this familiar and slowly changing dial spread out before her, she knew the time to a minute. Heavy Tree Hill, a lesser height in the distance, was already wiped out by that shadowy index finger — half past seven! The stage would be at Hickory Hill just before half past eight; she ought to anticipate it, if possible, — it would stay ten minutes to change horses, — she *must* arrive before it left!

There was a good two-mile level before the rise of the next range. Now, Blue Lightning! all you know! And that was much, — for with the little chip hat and fluttering ribbons well bent down over the bluish mane, and the streaming gauze of her mantle almost level with the horse's back, she swept down across the long tableland like a skimming blue-jay. A few more birdlike dips up and down the undulations, and then came the long, cruel ascent of the Divide.

Acrid with perspiration, caking with dust, slithering in the slippery, impalpable powder of the road, groggily staggering in a red dusty dream, coughing, snorting, head-tossing; becoming suddenly dejected, with slouching haunch and limp legs on easy slopes, or wildly spasmodic and agile on sharp acclivities, Blue Lightning began to have ideas and recollections! Ah! she was a devil for a lark — this lightly clinging, caressing, blarneying, cooing creature — up there! He remembered her now. Ha! very well then. Hoop-la! And suddenly leaping out like a rabbit, bucking, trotting hard, ambling lightly, "loping" on three legs and recreating himself, — as only a California mustang could, — the invincible Blue Lightning at last stood triumphantly upon the summit. The evening star had just pricked itself

through the golden mist of the horizon line, — eight o'clock! She could do it now! But here, suddenly, her first hesitation seized her. She knew her horse, she knew the trail, she knew herself, — but did she know *the man* to whom she was riding? A cold chill crept over her, and then she shivered in a sudden blast; it was Night at last swooping down from the now invisible Sierras, and possessing all it touched. But it was only one long descent to Hickory Hill now, and she swept down securely on its wings. Half past eight! The lights of the settlement were just ahead of her — but so, too, were the two lamps of the waiting stage before the post-office and hotel.

Happily the lounging crowd were gathered around the hotel, and she slipped into the post-office from the rear, unperceived. As she stepped behind the partition, its only occupant — a good-looking young fellow with a reddish mustache — turned towards her with a flush of delighted surprise. But it changed at the sight of the white, determined face and the brilliant eyes that had never looked once towards him, but were fixed upon a large bag, whose yawning mouth was still open and propped up beside his desk.

"Where is the through money-letter that came in that bag?" she said quickly.

"What — do — you — mean?" he stammered, with a face that had suddenly grown whiter than her own.

"I mean that it 's a *decoy*, checked at Heavy Tree Crossing, and that Mr. Home, of San Francisco, is now waiting at my office to know if you have taken it!"

The laugh and lie that he had at first tried to summon to mouth and lips never reached them. For, under the spell of her rigid, truthful face, he turned almost mechanically to his desk, and took out a package.

"Good God! you 've opened it already!" she cried, pointing to the broken seal.

The expression on her face, more than anything she had

said, convinced him that she knew all. He stammered under the new alarm that her despairing tone suggested. "Yes! — I was owing some bills — the collector was waiting here for the money, and I took something from the packet. But I was going to make it up by next mail — I swear it."

"How much have you taken?"

"Only a trifle. I" —

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars!"

She dragged the money she had brought from Laurel Run from her pocket, and counting out the sum, replaced it in the open package. He ran quickly to get the sealing-wax, but she motioned him away as she dropped the package back into the mail-bag. "No; as long as the money is found in the bag the package may have been broken *accidentally*. Now burst open one or two of those other packages a little — so;" she took out a packet of letters and bruised their official wrappings under her little foot until the tape fastening was loosened. "Now give me something heavy." She caught up a brass two-pound weight, and in the same feverish but collected haste wrapped it in paper, sealed it, stamped it, and addressing it in a large printed hand to herself at Laurel Hill, dropped it in the bag. Then she closed the bag and locked it; he would have assisted her, but she again waved him away. "Send for the expressman, and keep yourself out of the way for a moment," she said curtly.

An attitude of weak admiration and foolish passion had taken the place of his former tremulous fear. He obeyed excitedly, but without a word. Mrs. Baker wiped her moist forehead and parched lips, and shook out her skirt. Well might the young expressman start at the unexpected revelation of those sparkling eyes and that demurely smiling mouth at the little window.

"Mrs. Baker!"

She put her finger quickly to her lips, and threw a world of unutterable and enigmatical meaning into her mischievous face.

"There 's a big San Francisco swell takin' my place at Laurel to-night, Charley."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And it 's a pity that the Omnibus Way Bag happened to get such a shaking up and banging round already, coming here."

"Eh?"

"I say," continued Mrs. Baker, with great gravity and dancing eyes, "that it would be just *awful* if that keerful city clerk found things kinder mixed up inside when he comes to open it. I would n't give him trouble for the world, Charley."

"No, ma'am, it ain't like you."

"So you 'll be particularly careful on *my* account."

"Mrs. Baker," said Charley, with infinite gravity, "if that bag *should tumble off a dozen times* between this and Laurel Hill, I 'll hop down and pick it up myself."

"Thank you! shake!"

They shook hands gravely across the window-ledge.

"And you ain't going down with us, Mrs. Baker?"

"Of course not; it would n't do, — for *I ain't here*, — don't you see?"

"Of course!"

She handed him the bag through the door. He took it carefully, but in spite of his great precaution fell over it twice on his way to the road, where from certain exclamations and shouts it seemed that a like miserable mischance attended its elevation to the boot. Then Mrs. Baker came back into the office, and, as the wheels rolled away, threw herself into a chair, and inconsistently gave way for the first time to an outburst of tears. Then her hand was

grasped suddenly and she found Green on his knees before her. She started to her feet.

"Don't move," he said, with weak hysteric passion, "but listen to me, for God's sake! I am ruined, I know, even though you have just saved me from detection and disgrace. I have been mad! — a fool, to do what I have done, I know, but you do not know all — you do not know why I did it — you cannot think of the temptation that has driven me to it. Listen, Mrs. Baker. I have been striving to get money, honestly, dishonestly — any way, to look well in *your* eyes — to make myself worthy of you — to make myself rich, and to be able to offer you a home and take you away from Laurel Run. It was all for *you*, it was all for love of *you*, Betsy, my darling. Listen to me!"

In the fury, outraged sensibility, indignation, and infinite disgust that filled her little body at that moment, she should have been large, imperious, goddess-like, and commanding. But God is at times ironical with suffering womanhood. She could only writhe her hand from his grasp with childish contortions; she could only glare at him with eyes that were prettily and piquantly brilliant; she could only slap at his detaining hand with a plump and velvety palm, and when she found her voice it was high falsetto. And all she could say was, "Leave me be, loony, or I'll scream!"

He rose, with a weak, confused laugh, half of miserable affectation and half of real anger and shame.

"What did you come riding over here for, then? What did you take all this risk for? Why did you rush over here to share my disgrace — for *you* are as much mixed up with this now as *I* am — if you didn't calculate to share *everything else* with me? What did you come here for, then, if not for *me?*"

"What did *I* come here for?" said Mrs. Baker, with

every drop of red blood gone from her cheek and trembling lip. "What — did — I — come here for? Well! — I came here for *John Baker's* sake! John Baker, who stood between you and death at Burnt Ridge, as I stand between you and damnation at Laurel Run, Mr. Green! Yes, John Baker, lying under half of Burnt Ridge, but more to me this day than any living man crawling over it — in — in" — oh, fatal climax! — "in a month o' Sundays! What did I come here for? I came here as John Baker's livin' wife to carry on dead John Baker's work. Yes, dirty work this time, maybe, Mr. Green! but his work and for *him* only — precious! That 's what I came here for; that 's what I *live* for; that 's what I 'm waiting for — to be up to *him* and his work always! That 's me — Betsy Baker!"

She walked up and down rapidly, tying her chip hat under her chin again. Then she stopped, and taking her chamois purse from her pocket, laid it sharply on the desk.

"Stanton Green, don't be a fool! Rise up out of this, and be a man again. Take enough out o' that bag to pay what you owe gov'ment, send in your resignation, and keep the rest to start you in an honest life elsewhere. But light out o' Hickory Hill afore this time to-morrow."

She pulled her mantle from the wall and opened the door.

"You are going?" he said bitterly.

"Yes." Either she could not hold seriousness long in her capricious little fancy, or, with feminine tact, she sought to make the parting less difficult for him, for she broke into a dazzling smile. "Yes, I 'm goin' to run Blue Lightning agin Charley and that way bag back to Laurel Run, and break the record."

. . . . . .

It is said that she did! Perhaps owing to the fact that the grade of the return journey to Laurel Run was in her

favor, and that she could avoid the long, circuitous ascent to the summit taken by the stage, or that, owing to the extraordinary difficulties in the carriage of the way bag, — which had to be twice rescued from under the wheels of the stage, — she entered the Laurel Run post-office as the coach leaders came trotting up the hill. Mr. Home was already on the platform.

"You 'll have to ballast your next way bag, boss," said Charley gravely, as it escaped his clutches once more in the dust of the road, "or you 'll have to make a new contract with the company. We 've lost ten minutes in five miles over that bucking thing."

Home did not reply, but quickly dragged his prize into the office, scarcely noticing Mrs. Baker, who stood beside him pale and breathless. As the bolt of the bag was drawn, revealing its chaotic interior, Mrs. Baker gave a little sigh. Home glanced quickly at her, emptied the bag upon the floor, and picked up the broken and half-filled money parcel. Then he collected the scattered coins and counted them. "It 's all right, Mrs. Baker," he said gravely. "*He* 's safe this time."

"I 'm so glad!" said little Mrs. Baker, with a hypocritical gasp.

"So am I," returned Home, with increasing gravity, as he took the coins, "for, from all I have gathered this afternoon, it seems he was an old pioneer of Laurel Run, a friend of your husband's, and, I think, more fool than knave!" He was silent for a moment, clicking the coins against each other; then he said carelessly, "Did he get quite away, Mrs. Baker?"

"I 'm sure I don't know what you 're talking about," said Mrs. Baker, with a lofty air of dignity, but a somewhat debasing color. "I don't see why *I* should know anything about it, or why he should go away at all."

"Well," said Mr. Home, laying his hand gently on the

widow's shoulder,—"well, you see, it might have occurred to his friends that the *coins were marked!* That is, no doubt, the reason why he would take their good advice and go. But, as I said before, Mrs. Baker, *you* 're all right, whatever happens, — the government stands by *you!*"

A NIGHT AT "HAYS"

CHAPTER I

It was difficult to say if Hays' farmhouse, or "Hays," as it was familiarly called, looked any more bleak and cheerless that winter afternoon than it usually did in the strong summer sunshine. Painted a cold merciless white, with scant projections for shadows, a roof of white-pine shingles, bleached lighter through sun and wind, and covered with low, white-capped chimneys, it looked even more stark and chilly than the drifts which had climbed its low roadside fence, and yet seemed hopeless of gaining a foothold on the glancing walls, or slippery, wind-swept roof. The storm, which had already heaped the hollows of the road with snow, hurled its finely granulated flakes against the building, but they were whirled along the gutters and ridges, and disappeared in smokelike puffs across the icy roof. The granite outcrop in the hilly field beyond had long ago whitened and vanished; the dwarf firs and larches which had at first taken uncouth shapes in the drift blended vaguely together, and then merged into an unbroken formless wave. But the gaunt angles and rigid outlines of the building remained sharp and unchanged. It would seem as if the rigors of winter had only accented their hardness, as the fierceness of summer had previously made them intolerable.

It was believed that some of this unyielding grimness attached to Hays himself. Certain it is that neither hardship nor prosperity had touched his character. Years ago his emigrant team had broken down in this wild but wooded

defile of the Sierras, and he had been forced to a winter encampment, with only a rude log cabin for shelter, on the very verge of the promised land. Unable to enter it himself, he was nevertheless able to assist the better equipped teams that followed him with wood and water and a coarse forage gathered from a sheltered slope of wild oats. This was the beginning of a rude "supply station" which afterwards became so profitable that when spring came and Hays' team were sufficiently recruited to follow the flood of immigrating gold-seekers to the placers and valleys, there seemed no occasion for it. His fortune had been already found in the belt of arable slope behind the wooded defile, and in the miraculously located coign of vantage on what was now the great highway of travel and the only oasis and first relief of the weary journey; the breaking down of his own team at that spot had not only been the salvation of those who found at "Hays" the means of prosecuting the last part of their pilgrimage, but later provided the equipment of returning teams.

The first two years of this experience had not been without hardship and danger. He had been raided by Indians and besieged for three days in his stockaded cabin; he had been invested by wintry drifts of twenty feet of snow, cut off equally from incoming teams from the pass and the valley below. During the second year his wife had joined him with four children, but whether the enforced separation had dulled her conjugal affection, or whether she was tempted by a natural feminine longing for the land of promise beyond, she sought it one morning with a fascinating teamster, leaving her two sons and two daughters behind her; two years later the elder of the daughters followed the mother's example, with such maidenly discretion, however, as to forbear compromising herself by any previous matrimonial formality whatever. From that day Hays had no further personal intercourse with the valley below. He

put up a hotel a mile away from the farmhouse that he might not have to dispense hospitality to his customers, nor accept their near companionship. Always a severe Presbyterian, and an uncompromising deacon of a far-scattered and scanty community who occasionally held their service in one of his barns, he grew more rigid, sectarian, and narrow day by day. He was feared, and although neither respected nor loved, his domination and endurance were accepted. A grim landlord, hard creditor, close-fisted patron, and a smileless neighbor who neither gambled nor drank, "Old Hays," as he was called, while yet scarce fifty, had few acquaintances and fewer friends. There were those who believed that his domestic infelicities were the result of his unsympathetic nature; it never occurred to any one (but himself probably) that they might have been the cause. In those Sierran altitudes, as elsewhere, the belief in original sin — popularly known as "pure cussedness" — dominated and overbore any consideration of passive, impelling circumstances or temptation, unless they had been actively demonstrated with a revolver. The passive expression of harshness, suspicion, distrust, and moroseness was looked upon as inherent wickedness.

The storm raged violently as Hays emerged from the last of a long range of outbuildings and sheds, and crossed the open space between him and the farmhouse. Before he had reached the porch, with its scant shelter, he had floundered through a snowdrift, and faced the full fury of the storm. But the snow seemed to have glanced from his hard angular figure as it had from his roof-ridge, for when he entered the narrow hallway his pilot-jacket was unmarked, except where a narrow line of powdered flakes outlined the seams as if worn. To the right was an apartment, half office, half sitting-room, furnished with a dark and chilly iron safe, a sofa and chairs covered with black and coldly shining horsehair. Here Hays not only removed his upper coat,

but his under one also, and drawing a chair before the fire sat down in his shirt-sleeves. It was his usual rustic pioneer habit, and might have been some lingering reminiscence of certain remote ancestors to whom clothes were an impediment. He was warming his hands and placidly ignoring his gaunt arms in their thinly clad "hickory" sleeves, when a young girl of eighteen sauntered, half perfunctorily, half inquisitively into the room. It was his only remaining daughter. Already elected by circumstances to a dry household virginity, her somewhat large features, sallow complexion, and tasteless, unattractive dress, did not obviously suggest a sacrifice. Since her sister's departure she had taken sole charge of her father's domestic affairs and the few rude servants he employed, with a certain inherited following of his own moods and methods. To the neighbors she was known as "Miss Hays," — a dubious respect that, in a community of familiar "Sallies," "Mamies," "Pussies," was grimly prophetic. Yet she rejoiced in the Oriental appellation of "Zuleika." To this it is needless to add that it was impossible to conceive any one who looked more decidedly Western.

"Ye kin put some things in my carpet-bag agin the time the sled comes round," said her father meditatively, without looking up.

"Then you 're not coming back to-night?" asked the girl curiously. "What 's goin' on at the summit, father?"

"*I* am," he said grimly. "You don't reckon I kalkilate to stop thar! I 'm going on as far as Horseley's to close up that contract afore the weather changes."

"I kinder allowed it was funny you 'd go to the hotel to-night. There 's a dance there; those two Wetherbee girls and Mamie Harris passed up the road an hour ago on a wood-sled, nigh blown to pieces and sittin' up in the snow like skeert white rabbits."

Hays' brow darkened heavily.

"Let 'em go," he said in a hard voice that the fire did not seem to have softened. "Let 'em go for all the good their fool-parents will ever get outer them, or the herd of wayside cattle they 've let them loose among."

"I reckon they have n't much to do at home, or are hard put for company, to travel six miles in the snow to show off their prinkin' to a lot of idle louts shiny with bear's grease and scented up with doctor's stuff," added the girl, shrugging her shoulders, with a touch of her father's mood and manner.

Perhaps it struck Hays at that moment that her attitude was somewhat monstrous and unnatural for one still young and presumably like other girls, for, after glancing at her under his heavy brows, he said in a gentler tone: —

"Never *you* mind, Zuly. When your brother Jack comes home he 'll know what 's what, and have all the proper New York ways and style. It 's nigh on three years now that he 's had the best training Dr. Dawson's Academy could give, — sayin' nothing of the pow'ful Christian example of one of the best preachers in the States. They may n't have worldly, ungodly fandangoes where he is, and riotous livin', and scarlet abominations, but I 've been told that they 've 'tea circles,' and 'assemblies,' and 'harmony concerts' of young folks — and dancin' — yes, fine square dancin' under control. No, I ain't stinted him in anythin'. You kin remember that, Zuleika, when you hear any more gossip and backbitin' about your father's meanness. I ain't spared no money for him."

"I reckon not," said the girl a little sharply. "Why, there 's that draft fur two hundred and fifty dollars that kem only last week from the Doctor's fur extras."

"Yes," replied Hays, with a slight knitting of the brows, "the Doctor mout hev writ more particklers, but parsons ain't allus business men. I reckon these here extrys were to push Jack along in the term, as the Doctor

knew I wanted him back here in the spring, now that his brother has got to be too stiff-necked and self-opinionated to do his father's work." It seemed from this that there had been a quarrel between Hays and his eldest son, who conducted his branch business at Sacramento, and who had in a passion threatened to set up a rival establishment to his father's. And it was also evident from the manner of the girl that she was by no means a strong partisan of her father in the quarrel.

"You 'd better find out first how all the schoolin' and trainin' of Jack's is goin' to jibe with the Ranch, and if he ain't been eddicated out of all knowledge of station business or keer for it. New York ain't Hays' Ranch, and these yer 'assemblies' and 'harmony' doin's and their airs and graces may put him out of conceit with our plain ways. I reckon ye did n't take that to mind when you 've been hustlin' round payin' two hundred and fifty dollar drafts for Jack and quo'lin' with 'Bijah! I ain't sayin' nothin', father, only mebbe if 'Bijah had had drafts and extrys flourished around him a little more, mebbe he 'd have been more polite and not so rough spoken. Mebbe," she continued, with a little laugh, "even *I* 'd be a little more in the style to suit Master Jack when he comes ef I had three hundred dollars' worth of convent schoolin' like Mamie Harris."

"Yes, and you 'd have only made yourself fair game for ev'ry schemin', lazy sport or counter-jumper along the road from this to Sacramento!" responded Hays savagely.

Zuleika laughed again constrainedly, but in a way that might have suggested that this dreadful contingency was still one that it was possible to contemplate without entire consternation. As she moved slowly towards the door she stopped, with her hand on the lock, and said tentatively, "I reckon you won't be wantin' any supper before you go? You 're almost sure to be offered suthin' up at Horseley's.

while if I have to cook you up suthin' now and still have the men's regular supper to get at seven, it makes all the expense of an extra meal."

Hays hesitated. He would have preferred his supper now, and had his daughter pressed him would have accepted it. But economy, which was one of Zuleika's inherited instincts, vaguely appearing to him to be a virtue, interchangeable with chastity and abstemiousness, was certainly to be encouraged in a young girl. It hardly seems possible that with an eye single to the integrity of the larder she could ever look kindly on the blandishments of his sex, or, indeed, be exposed to them. He said simply, "Don't cook for me," and resumed his attitude before the fire as the girl left the room.

As he sat there, grim and immovable as one of the battered fire-dogs before him, the wind in the chimney seemed to carry on a deep-throated, dejected, and confidential conversation with him, but really had very little to reveal. There were no haunting reminiscences of his married life in this room, which he had always occupied in preference to the company or sitting room beyond. There were no familiar shadows of the past lurking in its corners to pervade his reverie. When he did reflect, which was seldom, there was always in his mind a vague idea of a central injustice to which he had been subjected, that was to be avoided by circuitous movement, to be hidden by work, but never to be surmounted. And to-night he was going out in the storm, which he could understand and fight, as he had often done before, and he was going to drive a bargain with a man like himself and get the better of him if he could, as he had done before, and another day would be gone, and that central injustice which he could not understand would be circumvented, and he would still be holding his own in the world. And the God of Israel whom he believed in, and who was a hard but conscientious Provi-

dence, something like himself, would assist him perhaps some day to the understanding of this same vague injustice which He was, for some strange reason, permitting. But never more unrelenting and unsparing of others than when under conviction of Sin himself, and never more harsh and unforgiving than when fresh from the contemplation of the Divine Mercy, he still sat there grimly holding his hand to a warmth that never seemed to get nearer his heart than that, when his daughter reëntered the room with his carpet-bag.

To rise, put on his coat and overcoat, secure a fur cap on his head by a woolen comforter, covering his ears and twined round his throat, and to rigidly offer a square and weather-beaten cheek to his daughter's dusty kiss, did not, apparently, suggest any lingering or hesitation. The sled was at the door, which, for a tumultuous moment, opened on the storm and the white vision of a horse knee-deep in a drift, and then closed behind him. Zuleika shot the bolt, brushed some flakes of the invading snow from the mat, and, after frugally raking down the fire on the hearth her father had just quitted, retired through the long passage to the kitchen and her domestic supervision.

It was a few hours later, supper had long past; the "hands" had one by one returned to their quarters under the roof or in the adjacent lofts, and Zuleika and the two maids had at last abandoned the kitchen for their bedrooms beyond. Zuleika herself, by the light of a solitary candle, had entered the office and had dropped meditatively into a chair, as she slowly raked the warm ashes over the still smouldering fire. The barking of dogs had momentarily attracted her attention, but it had suddenly ceased. It was followed, however, by a more startling incident, — a slight movement outside, and an attempt to raise the window!

She was not frightened; perhaps there was little for her

to fear; it was known that Hays kept no money in the house, the safe was only used for securities and contracts, and there were half a dozen men within call. It was, therefore, only her usual active, burning curiosity for novel incident that made her run to the window and peer out; but it was with a spontaneous cry of astonishment she turned and darted to the front door, and opened it to the muffled figure of a young man.

"Jack! Saints alive! Why, of all things!" she gasped incoherently.

He stopped her with an impatient gesture and a hand that prevented her from closing the door again.

"Dad ain't here?" he asked quickly.

"No."

"When 'll he be back?"

"Not to-night."

"Good," he said, turning to the door again. She could see a motionless horse and sleigh in the road, with a woman holding the reins.

He beckoned to the woman, who drove to the door and jumped out. Tall, handsome, and audacious, she looked at Zuleika with a quick laugh of confidence, as at some recognized absurdity.

"Go in there," said the young man, opening the door of the office; "I 'll come back in a minute."

As she entered, still smiling, as if taking part in some humorous but risky situation, he turned quickly to Zuleika and said in a low voice, "Where can we talk?"

The girl held out her hand and glided hurriedly through the passage until she reached a door, which she opened. By the light of a dying fire he could see it was her bedroom. Lighting a candle on the mantel, she looked eagerly in his face as he threw aside his muffler and opened his coat. It disclosed a spare, youthful figure, and a thin, weak face that a budding mustache only seemed to make

still more immature. For an instant brother and sister gazed at each other. Astonishment on her part, nervous impatience on his, apparently repressed any demonstration of family affection. Yet when she was about to speak he stopped her roughly.

"There now; don't talk. I know what you 're goin' to say — could say it myself if I wanted to — and it 's no use. Well, then, here I am. You saw *her*. Well, she 's *my wife* — we 've been married three months. Yes, my *wife;* married three months ago. I 'm here because I ran away from school — that is, I *have n't been there* for the last three months. I came out with her last steamer; we went up to the Summit Hotel last night — where they did n't know me — until we could see how the land lay, before popping down on dad. I happened to learn that he was out to-night, and I brought her down here to have a talk. We can go back again before he comes, you know, unless" —

"But," interrupted the girl, with sudden practicality, "you say you ain't been at Dr. Dawson's for three months! Why, only last week he drew on dad for two hundred and fifty dollars for your extras!"

He glanced around him and then arranged his necktie in the glass above the mantel with a nervous laugh.

"*Oh, that!* I fixed that up, and got the money for it in New York to pay our passage with. It 's all right, you know."

CHAPTER II

The girl stood looking at the ingenious forger with an odd, breathless smile. It was difficult to determine, however, if gratified curiosity were not its most dominant expression.

"And you 've got a wife — and *that* 's her?" she resumed.

"Yes."

"Where did you first meet her? Who is she?"

"She 's an actress — mighty popular in 'Frisco — I mean New York. Lot o' chaps tried to get her — I cut 'em out. For all dad 's trying to keep me at Dawson's — I ain't such a fool, eh?"

Nevertheless, as he stood there stroking his fair mustache, his astuteness did not seem to impress his sister to enthusiastic assent. Yet she did not relax her breathless, inquisitive smile as she went on: —

"And what are you going to do about dad?"

He turned upon her querulously.

"Well, that 's what I want to talk about."

"You 'll catch it!" she said impressively.

But here her brother's nervousness broke out into a weak impotent fury. It was evident, too, that in spite of its apparent spontaneous irritation its intent was studied. Catch it! Would he? Oh yes! Well, she 'd see *who* 'd catch it! Not him. No, he 'd had enough of this meanness, and wanted it ended! He was n't a woman to be treated like his sister, — like their mother, — like their brother, if it came to that, for he knew how he was to be brought back

to take 'Bijah's place in the spring; he 'd heard the whole story. No, he was going to stand up for his rights, — he was going to be treated as the son of a man who was worth half a million ought to be treated! He was n't going to be skimped, while his father was wallowing in money that he did n't know what to do with, — money that by rights ought to have been given to their mother and their sister. Why, even the law would n't permit such meanness — if he was dead. No, he 'd come back with Lottie, his wife, to show his father that there was one of the family that could n't be fooled and bullied, and would n't put up with it any longer. There was going to be a fair division of the property, and his sister Annie's property, and hers — Zuleika's — too, if she 'd have the pluck to speak up for herself. All this and much more he said. Yet even while his small fury was genuine and characteristic, there was such an evident incongruity between himself and his speech that it seemed to fit him loosely, and in a measure flapped in his gestures like another's garment. Zuleika, who had exhibited neither disgust nor sympathy with his rebellion, but had rather appeared to enjoy it as a novel domestic performance, the morality of which devolved solely upon the performer, retained her curious smile. And then a knock at the door startled them.

It was the stranger, — slightly apologetic and still humorous, but firm and self-confident withal. She was sorry to interrupt their family council, but the fire was going out where she sat, and she would like a cup of tea or some refreshment. She did not look at Jack, but, completely ignoring him, addressed herself to Zuleika with what seemed to be a direct challenge; in that feminine eye-grapple there was a quick, instinctive, and final struggle between the two women. The stranger triumphed. Zuleika's vacant smile changed to one of submission, and then, equally ignoring her brother in this double defeat, she hastened to the

kitchen to do the visitor's bidding. The woman closed the door behind her, and took Zuleika's place before the fire.

"Well?" she said in a half-contemptuous toleration.

"Well?" said Jack in an equally ill-disguised discontent, but an evident desire to placate the woman before him.

"It 's all right, you know. I 've had my say. It 'll come right, Lottie, you 'll see."

The woman smiled again, and glanced around the bare walls of the room.

"And I suppose," she said dryly, "when it comes right I 'm to take the place of your sister in the charge of this workhouse and succeed to the keys of that safe in the other room?"

"It 'll come all right, I tell you; you can fix things up here any way you 'll like when we get the old man straight," said Jack, with the iteration of feebleness. "And as to that safe, I 've seen it chock full of securities."

"It 'll hold one less to-night," she said, looking at the fire.

"What are you talking about?" he asked in querulous suspicion.

She drew a paper from her pocket.

"It 's that draft of yours that you were crazy enough to sign Dawson's name to. It was lying out there on the desk. I reckon it is n't a thing you care to have kept as evidence, even by your father."

She held it in the flames until it was consumed.

"By Jove, your head is level, Lottie!" he said, with an admiration that was not, however, without a weak reserve of suspicion.

"No, it is n't, or I would n't be here," she said curtly. Then she added, as if dismissing the subject, "Well, what did you tell her?"

"Oh, I said I met you in New York. You see, I thought she might think it queer if she knew I only met you in

San Francisco three weeks ago. Of course I said we were married."

She looked at him with weary astonishment.

"And of course, whether things go right or not, she 'll find out that I 've got a husband living, that I never met you in New York, but on the steamer, and that you 've lied. I don't see the *use* of it. You said you were going to tell the whole thing squarely and say the truth, and that 's why I came to help you."

"Yes; but don't you see, hang it all!" he stammered in the irritation of weak confusion, "I had to tell her *something.* Father won't dare to tell her the truth, no more than he will the neighbors. He 'll hush it up, you bet; and when we get this thing fixed you 'll go and get your divorce, you know, and we 'll be married privately on the square."

He looked so vague, so immature, yet so fatuously self-confident, that the woman extended her hand with a laugh and tapped him on the back as she might have patted a dog. Then she disappeared to follow Zuleika in the kitchen.

When the two women returned together they were evidently on the best of terms. So much so that the man, with the easy reaction of a shallow nature, became sanguine and exalted, even to an ostentatious exhibition of those New York graces on which the paternal Hays had set such store. He complacently explained the methods by which he had deceived Dr. Dawson; how he had himself written a letter from his father commanding him to return to take his brother's place, and how he had shown it to the Doctor and been three months in San Francisco looking for work and assisting Lottie at the theatre, until a conviction of the righteousness of his cause, perhaps combined with the fact that they were also short of money and she had no engagement, impelled him to his present heroic step. All of which Zuleika listened to with childish interest, but su-

perior appreciation of his companion. The fact that this woman was an actress, an abomination vaguely alluded to by her father as being even more mysteriously wicked than her sister and mother, and correspondingly exciting, as offering a possible permanent relief to the monotony of her home life, seemed to excuse her brother's weakness. She was almost ready to become his partisan — *after* she had seen her father.

They had talked largely of their plans; they had settled small details of the future and the arrangement of the property; they had agreed that Zuleika should be relieved of her household drudgery, and sent to a fashionable school in San Francisco with a music-teacher and a dressmaker. They had discussed everything but the precise manner in which the revelation should be conveyed to Hays. There was still plenty of time for that, for he would not return until to-morrow at noon, and it was already tacitly understood that the vehicle of transmission should be a letter from the Summit Hotel. The possible contingency of a sudden outburst of human passion not entirely controlled by religious feeling was to be guarded against.

They were sitting comfortably before the replenished fire; the wind was still moaning in the chimney, when, suddenly, in a lull of the storm, the sound of sleigh-bells seemed to fill the room. It was followed by a voice from without, and, with a hysterical cry, Zuleika started to her feet. The same breathless smile with which she had greeted her brother an hour ago was upon her lips as she gasped: —

"Lord, save us! — but it 's dad come back!"

I grieve to say that here the doughty redresser of domestic wrongs and retriever of the family honor lapsed white-faced in his chair idealess and tremulous. It was his frailer companion who rose to the occasion and even partly dragged him with her. "Go back to the hotel," she said quickly, "and take the sled with you, — you are not fit to face him

now! But he does not know *me*, and I will stay!" To the staring Zuleika: "I am a stranger stopped by a broken sleigh on my way to the hotel. Leave the rest to me. Now clear out, both of you. I 'll let him in."

She looked so confident, self-contained, and superior, that the thought of opposition never entered their minds, and as an impatient rapping rose from the door they let her, with a half-impatient, half-laughing gesture, drive them before her from the room. When they had disappeared in the distance, she turned to the front door, unbolted and opened it. Hays blundered in out of the snow with a muttered exclamation, and then, as the light from the open office door revealed a stranger, started and fell back.

"Miss Hays is busy," said the woman quietly, "I am afraid, on my account. But my sleigh broke down on the way to the hotel, and I was forced to get out here. I suppose this is Mr. Hays?"

A strange woman — by her dress and appearance a very worldling — and even braver in looks and apparel than many he had seen in the cities — seemed, in spite of all his precautions, to have fallen short of the hotel and been precipitated upon him! Yet under the influence of some odd abstraction he was affected by it less than he could have believed. He even achieved a rude bow as he bolted the door and ushered her into the office. More than that, he found himself explaining to the fair trespasser the reasons of his return to his own home. For, like a direct man, he had a consciousness of some inconsistency in his return — or in the circumstances that induced a change of plans which might conscientiously require an explanation.

"You see, ma'am, a rather singular thing happened to me after I passed the summit. Three times I lost the track, got off it somehow, and found myself traveling in a circle. The third time, when I struck my own tracks again, I concluded I 'd just follow them back here. I suppose I might

have got the road again by tryin' and fightin' the snow — but there 's some things not worth the fightin'. This was a matter of business, and, after all, ma'am, business ain't everythin', is it?"

He was evidently in some unusual mood, the mood that with certain reticent natures often compels them to make their brief confidences to utter strangers rather than impart them to those intimate friends who might remind them of their weakness. She agreed with him pleasantly, but not so obviously as to excite suspicion. "And you preferred to let your business go, and come back to the comfort of your own home and family."

"The comfort of my home and family?" he repeated in a dry, deliberate voice. "Well, I reckon I ain't been tempted much by *that*. That is n't what I meant." But he went back to the phrase, repeating it grimly, as if it were some mandatory text. "The comfort of my *own home and family!* Well, Satan has n't set *that* trap for my feet yet, ma'am. No; ye saw my daughter? well, that 's all my family; ye see this room? that 's all my home. My wife ran away from me; my daughter cleared out too, my eldest son as was with me here has quo'led with me and reckons to set up a rival business agin me. No," he said, still more meditatively and deliberately, "it was n't to come back to the comforts of my own home and family that I faced round on Heavy Tree Hill, I reckon."

As the woman, for certain reasons, had no desire to check this auspicious and unlooked-for confidence, she waited patiently. Hays remained silent for an instant, warming his hands before the fire, and then looked up interrogatively.

"A professor of religion, ma'am, or under conviction?"

"Not exactly," said the lady smiling.

"Excuse me, but in spite of your fine clothes I reckoned you had a serious look just now. A reader of Scripture, maybe?"

"I know the Bible."

"You remember when the angel with the flamin' sword appeared unto Saul on the road to Damascus?"

"Yes."

"It mout hev been suthin' in that style that stopped me," he said slowly and tentatively. "Though nat'rally *I* did n't *see* anything, and only had the queer feelin'. It might hev been *that* shied my mare off the track."

"But Saul was up to some wickedness, was n't he?" said the lady smilingly, "while *you* were simply going somewhere on business?"

"Yes," said Hays thoughtfully, "but my *business* might hev seemed like persecution. I don't mind tellin' you what it was if you 'd care to listen. But mebbe you 're tired. Mebbe you want to retire. You know," he went on with a sudden hospitable outburst, "you need n't be in any hurry to go; we kin take care of you here to-night, and it 'll cost you nothin'. And I 'll send you on with my sleigh in the mornin'. Per'aps you 'd like suthin' to eat — a cup of tea — or — I 'll call Zuleika;" and he rose with an expression of awkward courtesy.

But the lady, albeit with a self-satisfied sparkle in her dark eyes, here carelessly assured him that Zuleika had already given her refreshment, and, indeed, was at that moment preparing her own room for her. She begged he would not interrupt his interesting story.

Hays looked relieved.

"Well, I reckon I won't call her, for what I was goin' to say ain't exackly the sort o' thin' for an innocent, simple sort o' thing like her to hear — I mean," he interrupted himself hastily — "that folks of more experience of the world like you and me don't mind speakin' of — I 'm sorter takin' it for granted that you 're a married woman, ma'am?"

The lady, who had regarded him with a sudden rigidity, here relaxed her expression and nodded.

"Well," continued Hays, resuming his place by the fire, "you see this yer man I was goin' to see lives about four miles beyond the summit on a ranch that furnishes most of the hay for the stock that side of the Divide. He 's bin holdin' off his next year's contracts with me, hopin' to make better terms from the prospects of a late spring and higher prices. He held his head mighty high and talked big of waitin' his own time. I happened to know he could n't do it."

He put his hands on his knees and stared at the fire, and then went on: —

"Ye see, this man had had crosses and family trials. He had a wife that left him to jine a lot of bally dancers and painted women in the 'Frisco playhouses when he was livin' in the southern country. You 'll say that was like *my* own case, — and mebbe that was why it came to him to tell me about it, — but the difference betwixt *him* and *me* was that instead of restin' unto the Lord and findin' Him, and pluckin' out the eye that offended him 'cordin' to Scripter, as I did, *he* followed after *her* tryin' to get her back, until, findin' that was n't no use, he took a big disgust and came up here to hide hisself, where there was n't no playhouse nor play-actors, and no wimmen but Injin squaws. He preëmpted the land, and nat'rally, there bein' no one ez cared to live there but himself, he had it all his own way, made it pay, and, as I was sayin' before, held his head high for prices. Well — you ain't gettin' tired, ma'am?"

"No," said the lady, resting her cheek on her hand and gazing on the fire, "it 's all very interesting; and so odd that you two men, with nearly the same experiences, should be neighbors."

"Say buyer and seller, ma'am, not neighbors — at least Scriptoorily — nor friends. Well, — now this is where the Speshal Providence comes in, — only this afternoon Jim Briggs, hearin' me speak of Horseley's offishness" —

"*Whose* offishness?" asked the lady.

"Horseley's offishness, — Horseley 's the name of the man I 'm talkin' about. Well, hearin' that, he says: 'You hold on, Hays, and he 'll climb down. That wife of his has left the stage — got sick of it — and is driftin' round in 'Frisco with some fellow. When Horseley gets to hear that, you can't keep him here, — he 'll settle up, sell out, and realize on everything he 's got to go after her agin, — you bet.' That 's what Briggs said. Well, that 's what sent me up to Horseley's to-night — to get there, drop the news, and then pin him down to that contract."

"It looked like a good stroke of business and a fair one," said the lady in an odd voice. It was so odd that Hays looked up. But she had somewhat altered her position, and was gazing at the ceiling, and with her hand to her face seemed to have just recovered from a slight yawn, at which he hesitated with a new and timid sense of politeness.

"You 're gettin' tired, ma'am?"

"Oh dear, no!" she said in the same voice, but clearing her throat with a little cough. "And why did n't you see this Mr. Horseley after all? Oh, I forgot! — you said you changed your mind from something you 'd heard."

He had turned his eyes to the fire again, but without noticing as he did so that she slowly moved her face, still half hidden by her hand, towards him and was watching him intently.

"No," he said slowly, "nothin' I heard, somethin' I felt. It mout hev been that that set me off the track. It kem to me all of a sudden that he might be sittin' thar calm and peaceful-like ez I might be here, hevin' forgot all about her and his trouble, and here was me goin' to drop down upon him and start it all fresh agin. It looked a little like persecution — yes, like persecution. I got rid of it, sayin' to myself it was business. But I 'd got off the road meantime, and had to find it again, and whenever

I got back to the track and was pointed for his house, it all seemed to come back on me and set me off agin. When that had happened three times, I turned round and started for home."

"And do you mean to say," said the lady, with a discordant laugh, "that you believe, because *you* did n't go there and break the news, that nobody else will? That he won't hear of it from the first man he meets?"

"He don't meet any one up where he lives, and only Briggs and myself know it, and I 'll see that Briggs don't tell. But it was mighty queer this whole thing comin' upon me suddenly, — was n't it?"

"Very queer," replied the lady; "for" — with the same metallic laugh — "you don't seem to be given to this kind of weakness with your own family."

If there was any doubt as to the sarcastic suggestion of her voice, there certainly could be none in the wicked glitter of her eyes fixed upon his face under her shading hand. But haply he seemed unconscious of both, and even accepted her statement without an ulterior significance.

"Yes," he said, communingly, to the glaring embers of the hearth, "it must have been a special revelation."

There was something so fatuous and one-idea'd in his attitude and expression, so monstrously inconsistent and inadequate to what was going on around him, and so hopelessly stupid, — if a mere simulation, — that the angry suspicion that he was acting a part slowly faded from her eyes, and a hysterical smile began to twitch her set lips. She still gazed at him. The wind howled drearily in the chimney; all that was economic, grim, and cheerless in the room seemed to gather as flitting shadows around that central figure. Suddenly she arose with such a quick rustling of her skirts that he lifted his eyes with a start; for she was standing immediately before him, her hands behind her, her handsome, audacious face bent smilingly forward, and her bold, brilliant eyes within a foot of his own.

"Now, Mr. Hays, do you want to know what this warning or special revelation of yours *really* meant? Well, it had nothing whatever to do with that man on the summit. No. The whole interest, gist, and meaning of it was simply this, that you should turn round and come straight back here and" — she drew back and made him an exaggerated theatrical curtsy — "have the supreme pleasure of making *my* acquaintance! That was all. And now, as you 've *had* it, in five minutes I must be off. You 've offered me already your horse and sleigh to go to the summit. I accept them and go! Good-by!"

He knew nothing of a woman's coquettish humor; he knew still less of that mimic stage from which her present voice, gesture, and expression were borrowed; he had no knowledge of the burlesque emotions which that voice, gesture, and expression were supposed to portray, and finally and fatally he was unable to detect the feminine hysteric jar and discord that underlay it all. He thought it was strong, characteristic, and real, and accepted it literally. He rose.

"Ef you allow you can't stay, why, I 'll go and get the horse. I reckon he ain't bin put up yet."

"Do, please."

He grimly resumed his coat and hat and disappeared through the passage into the kitchen, whence, a moment later, Zuleika came flying.

"Well, what has happened?" she said eagerly.

"It 's all right," said the woman quickly, "though he knows nothing yet. But I 've got things fixed generally, so that he 'll be quite ready to have it broken to him by this time to-morrow. But don't you say anything till I 've seen Jack and you hear from *him*. Remember."

She spoke rapidly; her cheeks were quite glowing from some sudden energy; so were Zuleika's with the excitement of curiosity. Presently the sound of sleigh-bells

again filled the room. It was Hays leading the horse and sleigh to the door, beneath a sky now starlit and crisp under a northeast wind. The fair stranger cast a significant glance at Zuleika, and whispered hurriedly, "You know he must not come with me. You must keep him here."

She ran to the door muffled and hooded, leaped into the sleigh, and gathered up the reins.

"But you cannot go alone," said Hays, with awkward curtsy. "I was kalkilatin' "—

"You 're too tired to go out again, dad," broke in Zuleika's voice quickly. "You ain't fit; you 're all gray and krinkly now, like as when you had one of your last spells. She 'll send the sleigh back to-morrow."

"I can find my way," said the lady briskly; "there 's only one turn off, I believe, and that"—

"Leads to the stage station three miles west. You need n't be afraid of gettin' off on that, for you 'll likely see the down stage crossin' your road ez soon ez you get clear of the Ranch."

"Good-night," said the lady. An arc of white spray sprang before the forward runner, and the sleigh vanished in the road.

Father and daughter returned to the office.

"You did n't get to know her, dad, did ye?" queried Zuleika.

"No," responded Hays gravely, "except to see she was n't no backwoods or mountaineering sort. Now, there 's the kind of woman, Zuly, as knows her own mind and yours too; that a man like your brother Jack oughter pick out when he marries."

Zuleika's face beamed behind her father. "You ain't goin' to sit up any longer, dad?" she said, as she noticed him resume his seat by the fire. "It 's gettin' late, and you look mighty tuckered out with your night's work."

"Do you know what she said, Zuly?" returned her

father, after a pause, which turned out to have been a long, silent laugh.

"No."

"She said," he repeated slowly, "that she reckoned I came back here to-night to have the pleasure of her acquaintance!" He brought his two hands heavily down upon his knees, rubbing them down deliberately towards his ankles, and leaning forward with his face to the fire and a long-sustained smile of complete though tardy appreciation.

He was still in this attitude when Zuleika left him. The wind crooned over him confidentially, but he still sat there, given up apparently to some posthumous enjoyment of his visitor's departing witticism.

It was scarcely daylight when Zuleika, while dressing, heard a quick tapping upon her shutter. She opened it to the scared and bewildered face of her brother.

"What happened with her and father last night?" he said hoarsely.

"Nothing — why?"

"Read that. It was brought to me half an hour ago by a man in dad's sleigh, from the stage station."

He handed her a crumpled note with trembling fingers. She took it and read: —

"The game 's up and I 'm out of it! Take my advice and clear out of it too, until you can come back in better shape. Don't be such a fool as to try and follow me. Your father is n't one, and that 's where you 've slipped up."

"He shall pay for it, whatever he 's done," said her brother, with an access of wild passion. "Where is he?"

"Why, Jack, you would n't dare to see him now?"

"Would n't I?" He turned and ran, convulsed with passion, before the windows towards the front of the house. Zuleika slipped out of her bedroom and ran to her father's

room. He was not there. Already she could hear her brother hammering frantically against the locked front door.

The door of the office was partly open. Her father was still there. Asleep? Yes, for he had apparently sunk forward before the cold hearth. But the hands that he had always been trying to warm were colder than the hearth or ashes, and he himself never again spoke nor stirred.

. . . . . .

It was deemed providential by the neighbors that his youngest and favorite son, alarmed by news of his father's failing health, had arrived from the Atlantic States just at the last moment. But it was thought singular that after the division of the property he entirely abandoned the Ranch, and that even pending the division his beautiful but fastidious Eastern bride declined to visit it with her husband.

THE NEW ASSISTANT AT PINE CLEARING SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

The schoolmistress of Pine Clearing was taking a last look around her schoolroom before leaving it for the day. She might have done so with pride, for the schoolroom was considered a marvel of architectural elegance by the citizens, and even to the ordinary observer was a pretty, villa-like structure, with an open cupola and overhanging roof of diamond-shaped shingles and a deep Elizabethan porch. But it was the monument of a fierce struggle between a newer civilization and a barbarism of the old days, which had resulted in the clearing away of the pines — and a few other things as incongruous to the new life and far less innocent, though no less sincere. It had cost the community fifteen thousand dollars and the lives of two of its citizens.

Happily there was no stain of this on the clean white walls, the beautifully written gilt texts, or the shining blackboard that had offered no record which could not be daily wiped away. And, certainly, the last person in the world to suggest any reminiscences of its belligerent foundation was the person of the schoolmistress. Mature, thin, precise, — not pretty enough to have excited Homeric feuds, nor yet so plain as to preclude certain soothing graces, — she was the widow of a poor Congregational minister, and had been expressly imported from San Francisco to squarely mark the issue between the regenerate and unregenerate life. Low-voiced, gentlewomanly, with the pallor of ill health

perhaps unduly accented by her mourning, which was still cut modishly enough to show off her spare but good figure, she was supposed to represent the model of pious, scholastic refinement. The Opposition — sullen in ditches and at the doors of saloons, or in the fields truculent as their own cattle — nevertheless had lowered their crests and buttoned their coats over their revolutionary red shirts when *she* went by.

As she was stepping from the threshold, she was suddenly confronted by a brisk business-looking man, who was about to enter. "Just in time to catch you, Mrs. Martin," he said hurriedly; then, quickly correcting his manifest familiarity, he added, "I mean, I took the liberty of running in here on my way to the stage office. That matter you spoke of is all arranged. I talked it over with the other trustees, wrote to Sam Barstow, and he 's agreeable, and has sent somebody up, and," he rapidly consulted his watch, "he ought to be here now; and I 'm on my way to meet him with the other trustees."

Mrs. Martin, who at once recognized her visitor as the Chairman of the School Board, received the abrupt information with the slight tremulousness, faint increase of color, and hurried breathing of a nervous woman.

"But," she said, "it was only a *suggestion* of mine, Mr. Sperry; I really have no right to ask — I had no idea" —

"It 's all right, ma'am, — never you mind. We put the case square to Barstow. We allowed that the school was getting too large for you to tackle, — I mean, you know, to superintend single-handed; and that these Pike County boys they 're running in on us are a little too big and sassy for a lady like you to lasso and throw down — I mean, to sorter control — don't you see? But, bless you, Sam Barstow saw it all in a minit! He just jumped at it. I 've got his letter here — hold on" — he hastily produced a letter from his pocket, glanced over it, suddenly closed it again

with embarrassed quickness, yet not so quickly but that the woman's quicker eyes were caught and nervously fascinated by the expression "I 'm d—d" in a large business hand — and said in awkward haste, "No matter about reading it now — keep you too long — but he 's agreed all right, you know. Must go now — they 'll be waiting. Only I thought I 'd drop in a-passin', to keep you posted;" and, taking off his hat, he began to back from the porch.

"Is — is — this gentleman who is to assist me — a — a mature professional man — or a — graduate?" hesitated Mrs. Martin, with a faint smile.

"Don't really know — I reckon Sam — Mr. Barstow — fixed that all right. Must really go now;" and, still holding his hat in his hand as a polite compromise for his undignified haste, he fairly ran off.

Arrived at the stage office, he found the two other trustees awaiting him, and the still more tardy stagecoach. One, a large, smooth-faced, portly man, was the Presbyterian minister; the other, of thinner and more serious aspect, was a large mill-owner.

"I presume," said the Rev. Mr. Peaseley slowly, "that as our good brother Barstow, in the urgency of the occasion, has, to some extent, anticipated *our* functions in engaging this assistant, he is — a — a — satisfied with his capacity?"

"Sam knows what he 's about," said the mill-owner cheerfully, "and as he 's regularly buckled down to the work here, and will go his bottom dollar on it, you can safely leave things to him."

"He certainly has exhibited great zeal," said the reverend gentleman patronizingly.

"Zeal," echoed Sperry enthusiastically, "zeal? Why, he runs Pine Clearing as he runs his bank and his express company in Sacramento, and he 's as well posted as if he were here all the time. Why, look here;" he nudged the

mill-owner secretly, and, as the minister's back was momentarily turned, pulled out the letter he had avoided reading to Mrs. Martin, and pointed to a paragraph. "I 'll be d—d," said the writer, "but I 'll have peace and quietness at Pine Clearing, if I have to wipe out or make over the whole Pike County gang. Draw on me for a piano if you think Mrs. Martin can work it. But don't say anything to Peaseley first, or he 'll want it changed for a harmonium, and that lets us in for psalm-singing till you can't rest. Mind! I don't object to Church influence — it 's a good hold! — but you must run *it* with other things equal, and not let it run *you*. I 've got the schoolhouse insured for thirty thousand dollars — special rates too."

The mill-owner smiled. "Sam's head is level! But," he added, "he don't say much about the new assistant he 's sending."

"Only here, he says, 'I reckon the man I send will do all round; for Pike County has its claims as well as Boston.' "

"What does that mean?" asked the mill-owner.

"I reckon he means he don't want Pine Clearing to get too high-toned any more than he wants it too low down. He 's mighty square in his averages — is Sam."

Here speculation was stopped by the rapid oncoming of the stagecoach in all the impotent fury of a belated arrival. "Had to go round by Montezuma to let off Jack Hill," curtly explained the driver, as he swung himself from the box, and entered the hotel bar-room in company with the new expressman, who had evidently taken Hill's place on the box-seat. Autocratically indifferent to further inquiry, he called out cheerfully, "Come along, boys, and hear this yer last new yarn about Sam Barstow, — it 's the biggest thing out." And in another moment the waiting crowd, with glasses in their hands, were eagerly listening to the repetition of the "yarn" from the new expressman.

to the apparent exclusion of other matters, mundane and practical.

Thus debarred from information, the three trustees could only watch the passengers as they descended, and try to identify their expected stranger. But in vain: the bulk of the passengers they already knew, the others were ordinary miners and laborers; there was no indication of the new assistant among them. Pending further inquiry they were obliged to wait the conclusion of the expressman's humorous recital. This was evidently a performance of some artistic merit, depending upon a capital imitation of an Irishman, a German Jew, and another voice, which was universally recognized and applauded as being "Sam's style all over!" But for the presence of the minister, Sperry and the mill-owner would have joined the enthusiastic auditors, and inwardly regretted the respectable obligations of their official position.

When the story-teller had concluded amidst a general call for more drinks, Sperry approached the driver. The latter recognizing him, turned to his companion carelessly, said, "Here 's one of 'em," and was going away when Sperry stopped him.

"We were expecting a young man."

"Yes," said the driver impatiently, "and there he is, I reckon."

"We don't mean the new expressman," said the minister, smiling blandly, "but a young man who" —

"*That* ain't no new expressman," returned the driver in scornful deprecation of his interlocutor's ignorance. "He only took Hill's place from Montezuma. He 's the new kid reviver and polisher for that University you 're runnin' here. I say — you fellers oughter get him to tell you that story of Sam Barstow and the Chinaman. It 'd limber you fellers up to hear it."

"I fear there 's some extraordinary mistake here," said Mr. Peaseley, with a chilling Christian smile.

"Not a bit of it. He 's got a letter from Sam for one of ye. Yere, Charley — what 's your name! Come yere. Yere 's all yer three bosses waiting for ye."

And the supposed expressman and late narrator of amusing stories came forward and presented his credentials as the assistant teacher of Pine Clearing.

CHAPTER II

Even the practical Mr. Sperry was taken aback. The young man before him was squarely built, with broad shoulders, and a certain air of muscular activity. But his face, although good humored, was remarkable for offering not the slightest indication of studious preoccupation or mental training. A large mouth, light blue eyes, a square jaw, the other features being indistinctive — were immobile as a mask — except that, unlike a mask, they seemed to actually reflect the vacuity of the mood within, instead of concealing it. But as he saluted the trustees they each had the same feeling that even this expression was imported and not instinctive. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair cut so short as to suggest that a wig of some kind was necessary to give it characteristic or even ordinary human semblance. His manner, self-assured yet lacking reality, and his dress of respectable cut and material, yet worn as if it did not belong to him, completed a picture as unlike a student or schoolmaster as could be possibly conceived.

Yet there was the letter in Mr. Peaseley's hands from Barstow, introducing Mr. Charles Twing as the first assistant teacher in the Pine Clearing Free Academy!

The three men looked hopelessly at each other. An air of fatigued righteousness and a desire to be spiritually at rest from other trials pervaded Mr. Peaseley. Whether or not the young man felt the evident objection he had raised, he assumed a careless position, with his back and elbows against the bar; but even the attitude was clearly not his own.

"Are you personally known to Mr. Barstow?" asked Sperry, with a slight business asperity.

"Yes."

"That is — you are quite well acquainted with him?"

"If you 'd heard me gag his style a minute ago, so that everybody here knew who it was, you 'd say so."

Mr. Peaseley's eyes sought the ceiling, and rested on the hanging lamp, as if nothing short of direct providential interference could meet the occasion. Yet, as the eyes of his brother trustees were bent on him expectantly, he nerved himself to say something.

"I suppose, Mr. — Mr. Twing, you have properly understood the great — I may say, very grave, intellectual, and moral responsibilities of the work you seek to undertake — and the necessity of supporting it by *example*, by practice, by personal influence both in the school and *out of it*. Sir, I presume, sir, you feel that you are fully competent to undertake this?"

"I reckon *he* does!"

"*Who* does?"

"Sam Barstow, or he would n't have selected me. I presume," with the slightest possible and almost instinctive imitation of the reverend gentleman's manner, "his head is considered level."

Mr. Peaseley withdrew his eyes from the ceiling. "I have," he said to his companions, with a pained smile, "an important choir meeting to attend this afternoon. I fear I must be excused." As he moved towards the door, the others formally following him, until out of the stranger's hearing, he added, "I wash my hands of this. After so wanton and unseemly an exhibition of utter incompetency, and even of understanding of the trust imposed upon him — upon *us* — *my* conscience forbids me to interfere further. But the real arbiter in this matter will be — thank Heaven! — the mistress herself. You have only to confront her at

once with this man. *Her* decision will be speedy and final. For even Mr. Barstow will not dare to force so outrageous a character upon a delicate, refined woman, in a familiar and confidential capacity."

"That 's so," said Sperry eagerly; "she 'll settle it."

"And, of course," added the mill-owner, "that will leave *us* out of any difficulty with Sam."

The two men returned to the hapless stranger, relieved, yet constrained by the sacrifice to which they felt they were leading him. It would be necessary, they said, to introduce him to his principal, Mrs. Martin, at once. They might still find her at the schoolhouse, distant but a few steps. They said little else, the stranger keeping up an ostentatious whistling, and becoming more and more incongruous, they thought, as they neared the pretty schoolhouse. Here they *did* find Mrs. Martin, who had, naturally, lingered after the interview with Sperry.

She came forward to meet them, with the nervous shyness and slightly fastidious hesitation that was her nature. They saw, or fancied they saw, the same surprise and disappointment they had themselves experienced pass over her sensitive face, as she looked at him; they felt that their vulgar charge appeared still more outrageous by contrast with this delicate woman and her pretty, refined surroundings; but they saw that *he* enjoyed it, and was even — if such a word could be applied to so self-conscious a man — more at ease in her presence!

"I reckon you and me will pull together very well, ma'am," he said confidently.

They looked to see her turn her back upon him, faint, or burst out crying; but she did neither, and only gazed at him quietly.

"It 's a mighty pretty place you 've got here — and I like it, and if *we* can't run it, I don't know who can. Only just let me know *what* you want, ma'am, and you can count on me every time."

To their profound consternation Mrs. Martin smiled faintly.

"It rests with *you* only, Mrs. Martin," said Sperry quickly and significantly. "It 's *your* say, you know; you 're the only one to be considered or consulted here."

"Only just say what you want me to do," continued Twing, apparently ignoring the trustees; "pick out the style of job; give me a hint or two how to work it, or what you 'd think would be the proper gag to fetch 'em, and I 'm there, ma'am. It may be new at first, but I 'll get at the business of it quick enough."

Mrs. Martin smiled — this time quite perceptibly — with the least little color in her cheeks and eyes. "Then you've had no experience in teaching?" she said.

"Well — no."

"You are not a graduate of any college?"

"Not much."

The two trustees looked at each other. Even Mr. Peaseley had not conceived such a damning revelation.

"Well," said Mrs. Martin slowly, "perhaps Mr. Twing had better *come early to-morrow morning and begin.*"

"Begin?" gasped Mr. Sperry in breathless astonishment.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Martin in timid explanation. "If he is new to the work the sooner the better."

Mr. Sperry could only gaze blankly at his brother official. Had they heard aright? Was this the recklessness of nervous excitement in a woman of delicate health, or had the impostor cast some glamour upon her? Or was she frightened of Sam Barstow and afraid to reject his candidate? The last thought was an inspiration. He drew her quickly aside. "One moment, Mrs Martin! You said to me an hour ago that you did n't intend to have asked Mr. Barstow to send you an assistant. I hope that, merely because he *has* done so, you don't feel obliged to accept this man against your better judgment?"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Martin quietly.

The case seemed hopeless. And Sperry had the miserable conviction that by having insisted upon Mrs. Martin's judgment being final they had estopped their own right to object. But how could they have foreseen her extraordinary taste? He, however, roused himself for a last appeal.

"Mrs. Martin," he said in a lower voice, "I ought to tell you that the Reverend Mr. Peaseley strongly doubts the competency of that young man."

"Did n't Mr. Barstow make a selection at your request?" asked Mrs. Martin, with a faint little nervous cough.

"Yes — but" —

"Then his competency only concerns *me* — and I don't see what Mr. Peaseley has to say about it."

Could he believe his senses? There was a decided flush in the woman's pale face, and the first note of independence and asperity in her voice.

That night, in the privacy of his conjugal chamber, Mr. Sperry relieved his mind to another of the enigmatical sex, — the stout Southwestern partner of his joys and troubles. But the result was equally unsatisfactory. "Well, Abner," said the lady, "I never could see, for all your men's praises of Mrs. Martin, what that feller can see in *her* to like!"

CHAPTER III

Mrs. Martin was early at the schoolhouse the next morning, yet not so early but that she discovered that the new assistant had been there before her. This was shown in some rearrangement of the school seats and benches. They were placed so as to form a horseshoe before her desk, and at the further extremity of this semicircle was a chair evidently for himself. She was a little nettled at his premature action, although admitting the utility of the change, but she was still more annoyed at his absence at such a moment. It was nearly the school hour when he appeared, to her surprise, marshaling a file of some of the smaller children whom he had evidently picked up en route, and who were, to her greater surprise, apparently on the best of terms with him. "Thought I 'd better rake 'em in, introduce myself to 'em, and get 'em to know me before school begins. Excuse me," he went on hastily, "but I 've a lot more coming up, and I 'd better make myself square with them *outside*." But Mrs. Martin had apparently developed a certain degree of stiffness since their evening's interview.

"It seems to me quite as important, Mr. Twing," she said dryly, "that you should first learn some of your own duties, which I came here early to teach you."

"Not at all," he said cheerfully. "To-day I take my seat, as I 've arranged it, you see, over there with them, and watch 'em go through the motions. One rehearsal 's enough for *me*. At the same time, I can chip in if necessary." And before she could reply he was out of the schoolhouse again, hailing the newcomers. This was done

with apparently such delight to the children, and with some evidently imported expression into his smooth masklike face, that Mrs. Martin had to content herself with watching him with equal curiosity. She was turning away with a sudden sense of forgotten dignity, when a shout of joyous, childish laughter attracted her attention to the window. The new assistant, with half a dozen small children on his square shoulders, walking with bent back and every simulation of advanced senility, was evidently personating, with the assistance of astonishingly distorted features, the ogre of a Christmas pantomime. As his eye caught hers, the expression vanished, the masklike face returned; he set the children down, and moved away. And when school began, although he marshaled them triumphantly to the very door, — with what contortion of face or simulation of character she was unable to guess, — after he had entered the schoolroom and taken his seat every vestige of his previous facial aberration was gone, and only his usual stolidity remained. In vain, as Mrs. Martin expected, the hundred delighted little eyes before her dwelt at first eagerly and hopefully upon his face, but, as she *had not* expected, recognizing from the blankness of his demeanor that the previous performance was intended for them exclusively, the same eager eyes were presently dropped again upon their books in simple imitation, as if he were one of themselves. Mrs. Martin breathed freely, and lessons began.

Yet she was nervously conscious, meanwhile, of a more ill-omened occurrence. This was the non-arrival of several of her oldest pupils, notably, the refractory and incorrigible Pike County contingent to whom Sperry had alluded. For the past few days they had hovered on the verge of active insubordination, and had indulged in vague mutterings which she had resolutely determined not to hear. It was, therefore, with some inward trepidations, not entirely relieved by Twing's presence, that she saw the three Mac-

kinnons and the two Hardees slouch into the school a full hour after the lessons had begun. They did not even excuse themselves, but were proceeding with a surly and ostentatious defiance to their seats, when Mrs. Martin was obliged to look up, and — as the eldest Hardee filed before her — to demand an explanation. The culprit addressed — a dull, heavy-looking youth of nineteen — hesitated with an air of mingled doggedness and sheepishness, and then, without replying, nudged his companion. It was evidently a preconcerted signal of rebellion, for the boy nudged stopped, and turning a more intelligent, but equally dissatisfied, face upon the schoolmistress, began determinedly: —

"Wot 's our excuse for coming an hour late? Well, we ain't got none. *We* don't call it an hour late — *we* don't. We call it the right time. We call it the right time for *our* lessons, for we don't allow to come here to sing hymns with babbies. We don't want to know 'where, oh where, are the Hebrew children?' They ain't nothin' to us Americans. And we don't want any more Daniels in the Lions' Den played off on us. We have enough of 'em in Sunday-school. We ain't hankerin' much for grammar and dictionary hogwash, and we don't want no Boston parts o' speech rung in on us the first thing in the mo'nin'. We ain't Boston — we 're Pike County — *we* are. We reckon to do our sums, and our figgerin', and our sale and barter, and our interest tables and weights and measures when the time comes, and our geograffy when it 's on, and our readin' and writin' and the American Constitution in reg'lar hours, and then we calkilate to git up and git afore the po'try and the Boston airs and graces come round. That 's our rights and what our fathers pay school-taxes for, and we want 'em."

He stopped, looking less towards the schoolmistress than to his companions, for whom perhaps, after the schoolboy

fashion, this attitude was taken. Mrs. Martin sat, quite white and self-contained, with her eyes fixed on the frayed rim of the rebel's straw hat which he still kept on his head. Then she said quietly: —

"Take off your hat, sir."

The boy did not move.

"He can't," said a voice cheerfully.

It was the new assistant. The whole school faced rapidly towards him. The rebel leader and his followers, who had not noticed him before, stared at the interrupter, who did not, however, seem to exhibit any of the authority of office, but rather the comment and criticism of one of themselves. "Wot you mean?" asked the boy indignantly.

"I mean you can't take off your hat because you 've got some things stowed away in it you don't want seen," said Twing, with an immovable face.

"Wot things?" exclaimed the boy angrily. Then suddenly recollecting himself, he added, "Go along! You can't fool me! Think you 'll make me take off my hat — don't you?"

"Well," said Twing, advancing to the side of the rebel, "look here then!" With a dexterous movement and a slight struggle from the boy, he lifted the hat. A half-dozen apples, a bird's nest, two birds' eggs, and a fluttering half-fledged bird fell from it. A wave of delight and astonishment ran along the benches, a blank look of hopeless bewilderment settled upon the boy's face, and the gravity of the situation disappeared forever in the irrepressible burst of laughter, in which even his brother rebels joined. The smallest child who had been half-frightened, half-fascinated by the bold, bad, heroic attitude of the mutineer, was quick to see the ridiculousness of that figure crowned with cheap schoolboy plunder. The eloquent protest of his wrongs was lost in the ludicrous appearance of the protester. Even Mrs. Martin felt that nothing she

could say at that moment could lift the rebellion into seriousness again. But Twing was evidently not satisfied.

"Beg Mrs. Martin's pardon, and say you were foolin' with the boys," he said in a low voice.

The discomfited rebel hesitated.

"Say it, or I 'll *show what you 've got in your pockets!* " said Twing in a terribly significant aside.

The boy mumbled an apology to Mrs. Martin, scrambled in a blank, hopeless way to his seat, and the brief rebellion ignominiously ended. But two things struck Mrs. Martin as peculiar. She overheard the culprit say, with bated breath and evident sincerity, to his comrades, "Had n't nothing in my hat, anyway!" and one of the infant class was heard to complain, in a deeply injured way, that the bird's nest was *his*, and had been "stoled" from his desk. And there still remained the fact for which Twing's undoubted fascination over the children had somewhat prepared her — that at recess the malcontents — one and all — seemed to have forgiven the man who had overcome them, and gathered round him with unmistakable interest. All this, however, did not blind her to the serious intent of the rebellion, or of Twing's unaccountable assumption of her prerogative. While he was still romping with the children she called him in.

"I must remind you," she said, with a slight nervous asperity, "that this outrageous conduct of Tom Hardee was evidently deliberated and prepared by the others, and cannot end in this way."

He looked at her with a face so exasperatingly expressionless that she could have slapped it as if it had belonged to one of the older scholars, and said, — "But it *has* ended. It 's a dead frost."

"I don't know what you mean; and I must remind you also that in this school we neither teach nor learn slang."

His immobile face changed for an instant to a look of

such decided admiration that she felt her color rise; but he wiped his expression away with his hand as if it had been some artificial make-up, and said awkwardly, but earnestly: —

"Excuse me — won't you? But, look here, Mrs. Martin, I found out early this morning, when I was squaring myself with the other children, that there was this row hangin' on — in fact, that there was a sort of idea that Pike County was n't having a fair show — excuse me — in the running of the school, and that Peaseley and Barstow were a little too much on in every scene. In fact, you see, it was just what Tom said."

"This is insufferable," said Mrs. Martin, her eyes growing darker as her cheeks grew red. "They shall go home to their parents, and tell them from me" —

"That they 're all mistaken — excuse me — but that 's just what *they 're goin' to do.* I tell you, Mrs. Martin, their little game 's busted — I beg pardon — but it 's all over. You 'll have no more trouble with them."

"And you think that just because you found Tom had something in his hat, and exposed him?" said Mrs. Martin scornfully.

"Tom *had n't* anything in his hat," said Twing, wiping his mouth slowly.

"Nothing?" repeated Mrs. Martin.

"No."

"But I *saw* you take the things out."

"That was only a *trick!* He had nothing except what I had up my sleeve, and forced on him. He knew it, and that frightened him, and made him look like a fool, and so bursted up his conspiracy. There 's nothin' boys are more afraid of than ridicule, or the man or boy that makes 'em ridiculous."

"I won't ask you if you call this *fair* to the boy, Mr. Twing?" said Mrs. Martin hotly; "but is this your idea of discipline?"

"I call it fair, because Tom knew it was some kind of a trick, and was n't deceived. I call it discipline if it made him do what was right afterwards, and makes him afraid or unwilling to do anything to offend me or you again. He likes me none the worse for giving him a chance of being laughed out of a thing instead of being *driven* out of it. And," he added, with awkward earnestness, "if you 'll just leave all this to *me*, and only consider me here to take this sort of work — which ain't a lady's — off your hands, we 'll just strike our own line between the Peaseleys and Pike County — and run this school in spite of both."

A little mollified, a good deal puzzled, and perhaps more influenced by the man's manner than she had imagined, Mrs. Martin said nothing, but let the day pass without dismissing the offenders. And on returning home that evening she was considerably surprised to receive her landlady's extravagant congratulations on the advent of her new assistant. "And they do say, Mrs. Martin," continued that lady enthusiastically, "that you 're just setting your foot down square on that Peaseley and that Barstow, *both of 'em* — and choosing your own assistant yourself — a plain young fellow with no frills and fancies, but one that you could set about making all the changes you like, was just the biggest thing you ever did for Pine Clearing."

"And — they — consider him quite — competent?" said Mrs. Martin, with timid color and hesitating audacity.

"Competent! You ask my Johnny."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Martin was somewhat formally early at the schoolhouse the next morning. "Perhaps," she said, with an odd mixture of dignity and timidity, "we 'd better, before school commences, go over the lessons for the day."

"I *have*," he said quickly. "I told you *one* rehearsal was enough for me."

"You mean you have looked over them?"

"Got 'em by heart. Letter perfect. Want to hear me? Listen."

She did. He had actually committed to memory, and without a lapse, the entire text of rules, questions, answers, and examples of the lessons for the day.

CHAPTER IV

Before a month had passed, Mr. Twing's success was secure and established. So were a few of the changes he had quietly instituted. The devotional singing and Scripture reading which had excited the discontent of the Pike County children and their parents were not discontinued, but half an hour before recess was given up to some secular choruses, patriotic or topical, in which the little ones under Twing's really wonderful practical tuition exhibited such quick and pleasing proficiency that a certain negro minstrel camp-meeting song attained sufficient popularity to be lifted by general accord to promotion to the devotional exercises, where it eventually ousted the objectionable "Hebrew children" on the question of melody alone. Grammar was still taught at Pine Clearing School in spite of the Hardees and Mackinnons, but Twing had managed to import into the cognate exercises of recitation a wonderful degree of enthusiasm and excellence. Dialectical Pike County, that had refused to recognize the governing powers of the nominative case, nevertheless came out strong in classical elocution, and Tom Hardee, who had delivered his ungrammatical protest on behalf of Pike County, was no less strong, if more elegant, in his impeachment of Warren Hastings as Edmund Burke, with the equal sanction of his parents. The trustees, Sperry and Jackson, had marveled, but were glad enough to accept the popular verdict — only Mr. Peaseley still retained an attitude of martyr-like forbearance and fatigued toleration towards the new assistant and his changes. As to Mrs. Martin, she

seemed to accept the work of Mr. Twing after his own definition of it — as of a masculine quality ill suited to a lady's tastes and inclinations; but it was noticeable that while she had at first repelled any criticism of him whatever, she had lately been given to explaining his position to her friends, and had spoken of him with somewhat labored and ostentatious patronage. Yet when they were alone together she frankly found him very amusing, and his presumption and vulgarity so clearly unintentional that it no longer offended her. They were good friends without having any confidences beyond the duties of the school; she had asked no further explanation of the fact that he had been selected by Mr. Barstow without reference to any special antecedent training. What his actual antecedents were she had never cared to know, nor he apparently to reveal; that he had been engaged in some other occupations of superior or inferior quality would not have been remarkable in a community where the principal lawyer had been a soldier, and the miller a doctor. The fact that he admired her was plain enough to *her;* that it pleased her, but carried with it no ulterior thought or responsibility, might have been equally clear to others. Perhaps it was so to *him.*

Howbeit, this easy mutual intercourse was one day interrupted by what seemed a trifling incident. The piano, which Mr. Barstow had promised, duly made its appearance in the schoolhouse, to the delight of the scholars and the gentle satisfaction of Mrs. Martin, who, in addition to the rudimentary musical instruction of the younger girls, occasionally played upon it herself in a prim, refined, and conscientious fashion. To this, when she was alone after school hours, she sometimes added a faint, colorless voice of limited range and gentlewomanly expression. It was on one of these occasions that Twing, becoming an accidental auditor of this chaste, sad piping, was not only permitted

to remain to hear the end of a love-song of strictly guarded passion in the subjunctive mood, but at the close was invited to try his hand — a quick, if not a cultivated one — at the instrument. He did so. Like her, he added his voice. Like hers, it was a love-song. But there the similitude ended. Negro in dialect, illiterate in construction, idiotic in passion, and presumably addressed to the "Rose of Alabama," in the very extravagance of its childish infatuation it might have been a mockery of the schoolmistress's song but for one tremendous fact! In unrestrained feeling, pathetic yearning, and exquisite tenderness of expression, it was unmistakably and appallingly personal and sincere. It was true the lips spoken of were "lubly," the eyes alluded to were like "lightenin' bugs," but from the voice and gestures of the singer Mrs. Martin confusedly felt that they were intended for *hers*, and even the refrain that "she dressed so neat and looked so sweet" was glaringly allusive to her own modish mourning. Alternately flushing and paling, with a hysteric smile hovering round her small reserved mouth, the unfortunate gentlewoman was fain to turn to the window to keep her countenance until the song was concluded. She did not ask him to repeat it, nor did she again subject herself to this palpable serenade, but a few days afterwards, as she was idly striking the keys in the interval of a music lesson, one of her little pupils broke out, "Why, Mrs. Martin, if you ain't a-pickin' out that pow'ful pretty tune that Mr. Twing sings!"

Nevertheless, when Twing, a week or two later, suggested that he might sing the same song as a solo at a certain performance to be given by the school children in aid of a local charity, she dryly intimated that it was hardly of a character to suit the entertainment. "But," she added, more gently, "you recite so well; why not give a recitation?"

He looked at her with questioning and troubled eyes,

— the one expression he seemed to have lately acquired. "But that would be *in public!* There 'll be a lot of people there," he said doubtfully.

A little amused at this first apparent sign of a want of confidence in himself, she said, with a reassuring smile, "So much the better, — you do it really too well to have it thrown away entirely on children."

"Do *you* wish it?" he said suddenly.

Somewhat confused, but more irritated by his abruptness, she replied, "Why not?" But when the day came, and before a crowded audience, in which there was a fair sprinkling of strangers, she regretted her rash suggestion. For when the pupils had gone through certain calisthenic exercises — admirably taught and arranged by him — and "spoken their pieces," he arose, and, fixing his eyes on her, began Othello's defense before the Duke and Council. Here, as on the previous occasion, she felt herself personally alluded to in his account of his wooing. Desdemona, for some occult reason, vicariously appeared for her in the unwarrantable picture of his passion, and to this was added the absurd consciousness which she could not put aside that the audience, following with enthusiasm his really strong declamation, was also following his suggestion and adopting it. Yet she was also conscious, and, as she thought, as inconsistently, of being pleased and even proud of his success. At the conclusion the applause was general, and a voice added with husky admiration and familiarity: —

"Brayvo, Johnny Walker!"

Twing's face became suddenly white as a Pierrot mask. There was a dead silence, in which the voice continued, "Give us 'Sugar in the Gourd,' Johnny."

A few hisses, and cries of "Hush!" "Put him out!" followed. Mrs. Martin raised her eyes quickly to where her assistant had stood bowing his thanks a moment before. He was gone!

More concerned than she cared to confess, vaguely fearful that she was in some way connected with his abrupt withdrawal, and perhaps a little remorseful that she had allowed her personal feelings to interfere with her frank recognition of his triumph, she turned back to the schoolroom, after the little performers and their audience had departed, in the hope that he might return. It was getting late, the nearly level rays of the sun were lying on the empty benches at the lower end of the room, but the desk where she sat with its lid raised was in deep shadow. Suddenly she heard his voice in a rear hall, but it was accompanied by another's, — the same voice which had interrupted the applause. Before she could either withdraw or make herself known the two men had entered the room, and were passing slowly through it. She understood at once that Twing had slipped out into a janitor's room in the rear, where he had evidently forced an interview and explanation from his interrupter, and now had been waiting for the audience to disperse before emerging by the front door. They had evidently overlooked her in the shadow.

"But," said the stranger, as if following an aggrieved line of apology, "if Barstow knew who you were, and what you 'd done, and still thought you good enough to rastle round here and square up them Pike County fellers and them kids — what in thunder do you care if the others *do* find you out, as long as Barstow sticks to you?"

"I 've told you why, Dick," returned Twing gloomily.

"Oh, the schoolma'am!"

"Yes, she 's a saint, an angel. More than that — she 's a lady, Dick, to the tip of her fingers, who knows nothing of the world outside a parson's study. She took me on trust — without a word — when the trustees hung back and stared. She 's never asked me about myself, and now when she knows who and what I have been — she 'll loathe me!"

"But look here, Jim," said the stranger anxiously. "I 'll say it 's all a lie. I 'll come here and apologize to you afore *her*, and say I took you for somebody else. I 'll" —

"It 's too late," said Twing moodily.

"And what 'll you do?"

"Leave here."

They had reached the door together. To Mrs. Martin's terror, as the stranger passed out, Twing, instead of following him as she expected, said "Good-night," and gloomily reëntered the schoolroom. Here he paused a moment, and then throwing himself on one of the benches, dropped his head upon a desk with his face buried in his hands — like a very schoolboy.

What passed through Mrs. Martin's mind I know not. For a moment she sat erect and rigid at her desk. Then she slipped quietly down, and, softly as one of the last shadows cast by the dying sun, glided across the floor to where he sat.

"Mrs. Martin," he said, starting to his feet.

"I have heard all," she said faintly. "I could n't help it. I was here when you came in. But I want to tell you that I am content to know you only as you seem to be, — as I have always found you here, — strong and loyal to a duty laid upon you by those who had a full knowledge of all you had been."

"Did you? Do you know what I have been?"

Mrs. Martin looked frightened, trembled a moment, and, recovering herself with an effort, said gently, "I know nothing of your past."

"Nothing?" he repeated, with a mirthless attempt at laughter, and a quick breath. "Not that I 've been a — a — mountebank, a variety actor — a clown, you know, for the amusement of the lowest, at twenty-five cents a ticket. That I 'm 'Johnny Walker,' the song and dance man —

the all-round man — selected by Mr. Barstow to teach these boors a lesson as to what they wanted!"

She looked at him a moment — timidly, yet thoughtfully. "Then you are an actor — a person who simulates what he does not feel?"

"Yes."

"And all the time you have been here you have been acting the schoolmaster — playing a part — for — for Mr. Barstow?"

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Yes."

The color came softly to her face again, and her voice was very low. "And when you sang to me that day, and when you looked at me — as you did — an hour or two ago — while you were entertaining — you were — only — acting?"

Mr. Twing's answer was not known, but it must have been a full and complete one, for it was quite dark when he left the schoolroom — *not* for the last time — with its mistress on his arm.

A TREASURE OF THE GALLEON

Her father's house was nearly a mile from the sea, but the breath of it was always strong at the windows and doors in the early morning, and when there were heavy "southwesters" blowing in the winter, the wind brought the sharp sting of sand to her cheek, and the rain an odd taste of salt to her lips. On this particular December afternoon, however, as she stood in the doorway, it seemed to be singularly calm; the southwest trades blew but faintly, and scarcely broke the crests of the long Pacific swell that lazily rose and fell on the beach, which only a slanting copse of scrub-oak and willow hid from the cottage. Nevertheless, she knew this league-long strip of shining sand much better, it is to be feared, than the scanty flower-garden, arid and stunted by its contiguity. It had been her playground when she first came there, a motherless girl of twelve, and she had helped her father gather its scattered driftwood — as the fortunes of the Millers were not above accepting these occasional offerings of their lordly neighbor.

"I would n't go far to-day, Jenny," said her father, as the girl stepped from the threshold. "I don't trust the weather at this season; and besides you had better be looking over your wardrobe for the Christmas Eve party at Sol. Catlin's."

"Why, father, you don't intend to go to that man's?" said the girl, looking up with a troubled face.

"Lawyer Miller," as he was called by his few neighbors, looked slightly embarrassed. "Why not?" he asked in a faintly irritated tone.

"Why not? Why, father, you know how vulgar and conceited he is, — how everybody here truckles to him!"

"Very likely; he 's a very superior man of his kind, — a kind they understand here, too, — a great trapper, hunter, and pioneer."

"But I don't believe in his trapping, hunting, and pioneering," said the girl petulantly. "I believe it 's all as hollow and boisterous as himself. It 's no more real, or what one thinks it should be, than he is. And he dares to patronize you — you, father, an educated man and a gentleman!"

"Say rather an unsuccessful lawyer who was fool enough to believe that buying a ranch could make him a farmer," returned her father, but half jestingly. "I only wish I was as good at my trade as he is."

"But you never liked him, — you always used to ignore him; you 've changed, father" — She stopped suddenly, for her recollection of her father's quiet superiority and easy independence when he first came there was in such marked contrast to his late careless and weak concession to the rude life around them, that she felt a pang of vague degradation, which she feared her voice might betray.

"Very well! Do as you like," he replied, with affected carelessness; "only I thought, as we cannot afford to go elsewhere this Christmas, it might be well for us to take what we could find here."

"Take what we could find here!" It was so unlike him — he who had always been so strong in preserving their little domestic refinements in their rude surroundings, that their poverty had never seemed mean, nor their seclusion ignoble. She turned away to conceal her indignant color. She could share the household work with a squaw and Chinaman, she could fetch wood and water. Catlin had patronizingly seen her doing it, but to dance to his vulgar piping — never!

She was not long in reaching the sands that now lay before her, warm, sweet-scented from short beach grass, stretching to a dim rocky promontory, and absolutely untrod by any foot but her own. It was this virginity of seclusion that had been charming to her girlhood; fenced in between the impenetrable hedge of scrub-oaks on the one side, and the lifting green walls of breakers tipped with *chevaux de frise* of white foam on the other, she had known a perfect security for her sports and fancies that had captivated her town-bred instincts and native fastidiousness. A few white-winged sea-birds, as proud, reserved, and maiden-like as herself, had been her only companions. And it was now the custodian of her secret, — a secret as innocent and childlike as her previous youthful fancies, — but still a secret known only to herself.

One day she had come upon the rotting ribs of a wreck on the beach. Its distance from the tide line, its position, and its deep imbedding of sand, showed that it was of ancient origin. An omnivorous reader of all that pertained to the history of California, Jenny had in fancy often sailed the seas in one of those mysterious treasure-ships that had skirted the coast in bygone days, and she at once settled in her mind that her discovery was none other than a cast-away Philippine galleon. Partly from her reserve, and partly from a suddenly conceived plan, she determined to keep its existence unknown to her father, as careful inquiry on her part had found it was equally unknown to the neighbors. For this shy, imaginative young girl of eighteen had convinced herself that it might still contain a part of its old treasure. She would dig for it herself, without telling anybody. If she failed, no one would know it; if she were successful, she would surprise her father and perhaps retrieve their fortune by less vulgar means than their present toil. Thanks to the secluded locality and the fact that she was known to spend her leisure moments in wandering

there, she could work without suspicion. Secretly conveying a shovel and a few tools to the spot the next day, she set about her prodigious task. As the upper works were gone, and the galleon not large, in three weeks, working an hour or two each day, she had made a deep excavation in the stern. She had found many curious things, — the flotsam and jetsam of previous storms, — but as yet, it is perhaps needless to say, not the treasure.

To-day she was filled with the vague hope of making her discovery before Christmas Day. To have been able to take her father something on that day — if only a few old coins — the fruit of her own unsuspected labor and intuition — not the result of vulgar barter or menial wage — would have been complete happiness. It was perhaps a somewhat visionary expectation for an educated girl of eighteen, but I am writing of a young Californian girl, who had lived in the fierce glamour of treasure-hunting, and in whose sensitive individuality some of its subtle poison had been instilled. Howbeit, to-day she found nothing. She was sadly hiding her pick and shovel, as was her custom, when she discovered the fresh track of an alien foot in the sand. Robinson Crusoe was not more astounded at the savage footprint than Jenny Miller at this damning proof of the invasion of her sacred territory. The footprints came from and returned to the copse of shrubs. Some one might have seen her at work!

But a singular change in the weather, overlooked in her excitement, here forced itself upon her. A light film over sea and sky, lifted only by fitful gusts of wind, seemed to have suddenly thickened until it became an opaque vault, narrowing in circumference as the wind increased. The promontory behind her disappeared, as if swallowed up, the distance before her seemed to contract; the ocean at her side, the color of dull pewter, vanished in a sheet of slanting rain, and by the time she reached the house, half run-

ning, half carried along by the quartering force of the wind, a full gale was blowing.

It blew all the evening, reaching a climax and fury at past midnight that was remembered for many years along that coast. In the midst of it they heard the booming of cannon, and then the voices of neighbors in the road. "There was," said the voices, "a big steamer ashore just afore the house." They dressed quickly and ran out.

Hugging the edge of the copse to breathe and evade the fury of the wind, they struggled to the sands. At first, looking out to sea, the girl saw nothing but foam. But, following the direction of a neighbor's arm, for in that wild tumult man alone seemed speechless, she saw directly before her, so close upon her that she could have thrown a pebble on board, the high bows of a ship. Indeed, its very nearness gave her the feeling that it was already saved, and its occasional heavy roll to leeward, drunken, helpless, ludicrous, but never awful, brought a hysteric laugh to her lips. But when a livid blue light, lit in the swinging top, showed a number of black objects clinging to bulwarks and rigging, and the sea, with languid, heavy cruelty, pushing rather than beating them away, one by one, she knew that Death was there.

The neighbors, her father with the others, had been running hopelessly to and fro, or cowering in groups against the copse, when suddenly they uttered a cry — their first — of joyful welcome. And with that shout, the man she most despised and hated, Sol. Catlin, mounted on a "calico" mustang, as outrageous and bizarre as himself, dashed among them.

In another moment, what had been fear, bewilderment, and hesitation was changed to courage, confidence, and action. The men pressed eagerly around him, and as eagerly dispersed under his quick command. Galloping at his heels was a team with the whale-boat, brought from the

river, miles away. He was here, there, and everywhere; catching the line thrown by the rocket from the ship, marshaling the men to haul it in, answering the hail from those on board above the tempest, pervading everything and everybody with the fury of the storm; loud, imperious, domineering, self-asserting, all-sufficient, and successful! And when the boat was launched, the last mighty impulse came from his shoulder. He rode at the helm into the first hanging wall of foam, erect and triumphant! Dazzled, bewildered, crying and laughing, she hated him more than ever.

The boat made three trips, bringing off, with the aid of the hawser, all but the sailors she had seen perish before her own eyes. The passengers, — they were few, — the captain and officers, found refuge in her father's house, and were loud in their praises of Sol. Catlin. But in that grateful chorus a single gloomy voice arose, the voice of a wealthy and troubled passenger. "I will give," he said, "five thousand dollars to the man who brings me a box of securities I left in my stateroom." Every eye turned instinctively to Sol.; he answered only those of Jenny's. "Say ten thousand, and if the dod-blasted hulk holds together two hours longer I 'll do it, d—n me! You hear me! My name 's Sol. Catlin, and when I say a thing, by G—d, I do it!" Jenny's disgust here reached its climax. The hero of a night of undoubted energy and courage had blotted it out in a single moment of native vanity and vulgar avarice.

He was gone; not only two hours, but daylight had come and they were eagerly seeking him, when he returned among them, dripping and — empty-handed. He had reached the ship, he said, with another; found the box, and trusted himself alone with it to the sea. But in the surf he had to abandon it to save himself. It had perhaps drifted ashore, and might be found; for himself, he aban-

doned his claim to the reward. Had he looked abashed or mortified, Jenny felt that she might have relented, but the braggart was as all-satisfied, as confident and boastful as ever. Nevertheless, as his eye seemed to seek hers, she was constrained, in mere politeness, to add her own to her father's condolences. "I suppose," she hesitated, in passing him, "that this is a mere nothing to you after all that you did last night that was really great and unselfish."

"Were you never disappointed, miss?" he said, with exasperating abruptness.

A quick consciousness of her own thankless labor on the galleon, and a terrible idea that he might have some suspicion of it, and perhaps the least suggestion that she might have been disappointed in him, brought a faint color to her cheek. But she replied with dignity: —

"I really could n't say. But certainly," she added, with a new-found pertness, "you don't look it."

"Nor do you, miss," was his idiotic answer.

A few hours later, alarmed at what she had heard of the inroads of the sea, which had risen higher than had ever been known to the oldest settler, and perhaps mindful of yesterday's footprints, she sought her old secluded haunt. The wreck was still there, but the sea had reached it. The excavation between its gaunt ribs was filled with drift and the seaweed carried there by the surges and entrapped in its meshes. And there, too, caught as in a net, lay the wooden box of securities Sol. Catlin had abandoned to the sea.

This is the story as it was told to me. The singularity of coincidences has challenged some speculation. Jenny insisted at the time upon sharing the full reward with Catlin, but local critics have pointed out that from subsequent events this proved nothing. For she had married him!

THE TRANSFORMATION OF BUCKEYE CAMP

PART I

The tiny lights that had been far scattered and intermittent as fireflies all along the dark stream at last dropped out one by one, leaving only the three windows of "Parks' Emporium" to pierce the profoundly wooded banks of the South Fork. So all-pervading was the darkness that the mere opening of the "Emporium" front door shot out an illuminating shaft which revealed the whole length of the little main street of "Buckeye," while the simple passing of a single figure before one of the windows momentarily eclipsed a third of the settlement. This undue preëminence given to the only three citizens of Buckeye who were still up at ten o'clock seemed to be hardly justified by their outward appearance, which was that of ordinary long-bearded and long-booted river bar miners. Two sat upon the counter with their hands upon their knees, the third leaned beside the open window.

It was very quiet. The faint, far barking of a dog, or an occasional subdued murmur from the river shallows, audible only when the wind rose slightly, helped to intensify their solitude. So supreme had it become that when the man at the window at last continued his conversation meditatively, with his face towards it, he seemed to be taking all Nature into his confidence.

"The worst thing about it is, that the only way we can keep her out of the settlement is by the same illegal methods which we deplore in other camps. We have al-

ways boasted that Buckeye could get along without Vigilance Committees or Regulators."

"Yes, and that was because we started it on the principle of original selection, which we are only proposing to continue," replied one of the men on the counter. "So there 's nothing wrong about our sending a deputation to wait upon her, to protest against her settling here, and give her our reasons."

"Yes, only it has all the impudence without the pluck of the Regulators. You demand what you are afraid to enforce. Come, Parks, you know she has all the rights on her side. Look at it squarely. She proposes to open a store and sell liquor and cigars, which she serves herself, in the broken-down tienda which was regularly given to her people by the Spanish grantee of the land we 're squatting on. It 's not her fault but ours if we 've adopted a line of rules, which don't agree with hers, to govern the settlers on *her* land, nor should she be compelled to follow them. Nor because we justify *our* squatting here, on the ground that the Spanish grant is n't confirmed yet, can we forbid her squatting under the same right."

"But look at the moral question, Brace. Consider the example; the influence of such a shop, kept by such a woman, on the community! We have the right to protect ourselves — the majority."

"That 's the way the lynchers talk," returned Brace. "And I 'm not so sure about there being any moral question yet. You are assuming too much. There is no reason why she should n't run the tienda as decently — barring the liquor sale, which, however, is legal, and for which she can get a license — as a man could, and without interfering with our morals."

"Then what is the use of our rules?"

"They were made for those who consented to adopt them, as we all did. They still bind *us*, and if we don't

choose to buy her liquor or cigars, that will dispose of her and her tienda much more effectually than your protest. It 's a pity she 's a lone unprotected woman. Now if she only had a husband " —

"She carries a dagger in her garter."

This apparently irrelevant remark came from the man who had not yet spoken, but who had been listening with the languid unconcern of one who, relinquishing the labor of argument to others, had consented to abide by their decision. It was met with a scornful smile from each of the disputants, perhaps even by an added shrug of the shoulders from the woman's previous defender! *He* was evidently not to be taken in by extraneous sentiment. Nevertheless, both listened as the speaker, slowly feeling his knees as if they were his way to a difficult subject, continued with the same suggestion of stating general fact, but waiving any argument himself. "Clarkson of Angels allows she 's got a free, gaudy, picter-covered style with the boys, but that she can be gilt-edged when she wants to. Rowley Meade — him ez hed his skelp pulled over his eyes at one stroke, foolin' with a she bear over on Black Mountain — allows it would be rather monotonous in him attemptin' any familiarities with her. Bulstrode's brother, ez was in Marysville, said there was a woman — like to her, but not her — ez made it lively for the boys with a game called ' Little Monte,' and he dropped a hundred dollars there afore he came away. They do say that about seven men got shot in Marysville on account o' this one, or from some oneasiness that happened at her shop. But then," he went on slowly and deferentially as the faces of the two others were lowered and became fixed, "*she* says she tired o' drunken rowdies, — there 's a sameness about 'em, and it don't sell her pipes and cigars, and that 's *why* she 's coming here. Thompson over at Dry Creek sez that *that 's* where our reputation is playin' us! ' We 've got her

as a reward o' virtoo, and be d—d to us.' But," cautiously, "Thompson ain't drawed a sober breath since Christmas."

The three men looked in each other's faces in silence. The same thought occurred to each; the profane Thompson was right, and the woman's advent was the logical sequence of their own ethics. Two years previously, the Buckeye Company had found gold on the South Fork, and had taken up claims. Composed mainly of careful, provident, and thoughtful men, — some of cultivation and refinement, — they had adopted a certain orderly discipline for their own guidance solely, which, however, commended itself to later settlers, already weary of the lawlessness and reckless freedom which usually attended the inception of mining settlements. Consequently the birth of Buckeye was accompanied with no dangerous travail; its infancy was free from the diseases of adolescent communities. The settlers, without any express prohibition, had tacitly dispensed with gambling and drinking saloons; following the unwritten law of example, had laid aside their revolvers, and mingled together peacefully when their labors were ended, without a single peremptory regulation against drinking and playing, or carrying lethal weapons. Nor had there been any test of fitness or qualification for citizenship through previous virtue. There were one or two gamblers, a skillful duelist, and men who still drank whiskey who had voluntarily sought the camp. Of some such antecedents was the last speaker. Probably with two wives elsewhere, and a possible homicidal record, he had modestly held aloof from obtrusive argument.

"Well, we must have a meeting and put the question squarely to the boys to-morrow," said Parks, gazing thoughtfully from the window. The remark was followed by another long silence. Beyond, in the darkness, Buckeye, unconscious of the momentous question awaiting its decision, slept on peacefully.

"I brought the keg of whiskey and brandy from Red Gulch to-day that Dr. Duchesne spoke of," he resumed presently. "You know he said we ought to have some in common stock that he could always rely upon in emergencies, and for use after the tule fever. I did n't agree with him, and told him how I had brought Sam Denver through an attack with quinine and arrowroot, but he laughed and wanted to know if we 'd 'resolved' that everybody should hereafter have the Denver constitution. That 's the trouble with those old army surgeons, — they never can get over the 'heroics' of their past. Why, he told Parson Jennings that he 'd rather treat a man for jim-jams than one that was dying for want of stimulants. However, the liquor is here, and one of the things we must settle to-morrow is the question if it ought not to be issued only on Duchesne's prescription. When I made that point to him squarely, he grinned again, and wanted to know if I calculated to put the same restriction on the sale of patent medicines and drugs generally."

"'N' powder 'n' shot," contributed the indifferent man.

"Perhaps you 'd better take a look at the liquor, Saunders," said Parks, dismissing the ethical question. "*You* know more about it than we do. It ought to be the best."

Saunders went behind the counter, drew out two demijohns, and, possibly from the force of habit, selected *three* mugs from the crockery and poured some whiskey into each, before he could check himself.

"Perhaps we had better compare tastes," said Brace blandly. They all sipped their liquor slowly and in silence. The decision was favorable. "Better try some with water to see how it mixes," said Saunders, lazily filling the glasses with a practiced hand. This required more deliberation, and they drew their chairs to the table and sat down. A slight relaxation stole over the thoughtful faces of Brace and Parks, a gentle perspiration came over the

latter's brow, but the features and expression of Saunders never changed. The conversation took a broader range; politics and philosophy entered into it; literature and poetry were discussed by Parks and Brace, Saunders still retaining the air of a dispassionate observer, ready to be convinced, but abstaining from argument — and occasionally replenishing the glasses. There was felt to be no inconsistency between their present attitude and their previous conversation; rather it proved to them that gentlemen could occasionally indulge in a social glass together without frequenting a liquor saloon. This was stated with some degree of effusion by Parks and assented to with singular enthusiasm by Brace; Saunders nodding. It was also observed with great penetration by Brace that in having really *good*, specially selected liquor like that, the great danger of the intoshikat'n 'fx — he corrected himself with great deliberation, "the intoxicating effects" — of adulterated liquors sold in drinking saloons was obviated. Mr. Brace thought also that the vitiated quality of the close air of a crowded saloon had a great deal to do with it — the excess of carbon — hic — he begged their pardon — carbonic acid gas undoubtedly rendered people "slupid and steepy." "But here, from the open window," he walked dreamily to it and leaned out admiringly towards the dark landscape that softly slumbered without, "one could drink in only health and poetry."

"Wot 's that?" said Saunders, looking up.

"I said health and poetry," returned Brace, with some dignity. "I repeat" —

"No. I mean wot 's that noise? Listen."

They listened so breathlessly that the soft murmur of the river seemed to flow in upon them. But above it quite distinctly came the regular muffled beat of horse-hoofs in the thick dust and the occasional rattle of wheels over rocky irregularities. But still very far and faint, and fading like

the noises in a dream. Brace drew a long breath; Parks smiled and softly closed his eyes. But Saunders remained listening.

"That was over *our* road, near the turnpike!" he said musingly. "That 's queer; thar ain't any of the boys away to-night, and that 's a wagon. It 's some one comin' here. Hark to that! There it is again."

It was the same sound but more distinct and nearer, and then was lost again.

"They 're dragging through the river sand that 's just abreast o' Mallory's. Stopped there, I reckon. No! pushin' on again. Hear 'em grinding along the gravel over Hamilton's trailin's? Stopped agin — that 's before Somerville's shanty. What 's gone o' them now? Maybe they 've lost the trail and got onto Gray's slide through the woods. It 's no use lookin'; ye could n't see anything in this nigger dark. Hol' on! If they 're comin' through the woods, ye 'll hear 'em again jest off here. Yes! by thunder! here they are."

This time the clatter and horse-hoofs were before them, at the very door. A man's voice cried, "Whoa!" and there was a sudden bound on the veranda. The door opened; for an instant the entrance appeared to be filled with a mass of dazzling white flounces, and a figure which from waist to crown was impenetrably wrapped and swathed in black lace. Somewhere beneath its folds a soft Spanish, yet somewhat childish voice cried, "Tente. Hol' on," turned and vanished. This was succeeded by the apparition of a silent, swarthy Mexican, who dropped a small trunk at their feet and vanished also. Then the white-flounced and black-laced figure reappeared as the departing wagon rattled away, glided to the centre of the room, placed on the trunk a small foot, whose low-quartered black satin slipper seemed to be held only by the toe, threw back with both hands the black lace mantilla, which was pinned by

a red rose over her little right ear, and with her hands slightly extended and waving softly said, "Mira caballeros! 'Ere we are again, boys! Viva! Aow ees your mother? Aow ees that for high? Behold me! just from Pike!"

Parks and Brace, who had partly risen, fell back hopelessly in their chairs again and gazed at the figure with a feeble smile of vacuous pain and politeness. At which it advanced, lowered its black eyes mischievously over the table and the men who sat there, poured out a glass of the liquor, and said, "I look towards you, boys! Don't errise. You are just a leetle weary, eh? A leetle. Oh yes! a leetle tired of crookin' your elbow — eh? Don't care if the school keep! — eh? Don't want any pie! Want to go 'ome, eh?"

But here Mr. Parks rose with a slight difficulty, but unflinching dignity, and leaned impressively over the table. "May I ashk — may I be permitted to ask, madam, to what we may owe the pleasure of thish — of this — visit?"

Her face and attitude instantly changed. Her arms dropped and caught up the mantilla with a quick but not ungraceful sweep, and in apparently a single movement she was draped, wrapped, and muffled from waist to crown as before. With a slight inclination of her head, she said in quite another voice: "Si, señor. I have arrive here because in your whole great town of Booki there is not so much as one" — she held up a small brown finger — "as much as *one* leetle light or fire like thees; be-cause in this grand pueblo there is not one peoples who have not already sleep in his bed but thees! Bueno! I have arrive all the same like a leetle bird, like the small fly arrive to the light! not to *you* — only to *the light!* I go not to my casa for she is dark, and to-night she have nothing to make the fire or bed. I go not to the 'otel — there is not *one* " — the brown finger again uplifted — "'otel in Booki! I make the 'otel — the Fonda — in my hoose mañana — to-

morrow! To-night I and Sanchicha make the bed for us 'ere. Sanchicha, she stands herself now over in the street. We have mooch sorrow we have to make the caballeros mooch tr-rouble to make disposition of his house. But what will you?"

There was another awkward silence, and then Saunders, who had been examining the intruder with languid criticism, removed his pipe from his mouth and said quietly: —

"That 's the woman you 're looking for — Jovita Mendez!"

PART II

The rest of that interview has not been recorded. Suffice it that a few minutes later Parks, Brace, and Saunders left the Emporium, and passed the night in the latter's cabin, leaving the Emporium in possession of Miss Mendez and her peon servant; that at the earliest dawn the two women and their baggage were transferred to the old adobe house, where, however, a Mexican workman had already arrived, and with a basketful of red tiles was making it habitable. Buckeye, which was popularly supposed to sleep with one eye on the river, and always first repaired there in the morning to wash and work, was only awake to the knowledge of the invasion at noon. The meeting so confidently spoken of the night before had *not* been called. Messrs. Parks and Brace were suffering from headaches — undoubtedly a touch of tule chill. Saunders, at work with his partner in Eagle Bar, was as usual generous with apparently irrelevant facts on all subjects — but that of the strangers. It would seem as if the self-constituted Committee of Safety had done nothing.

And nothing whatever seemed to happen! Thompson of Angels, smoking a meditative pipe at noon on the trail, noticed the repairing of the old adobe house, casually spoke

of it on his return to his work, without apparent concern or exciting any comment. The two Billinger brothers saw Jovita Mendez at the door of her house an hour later, were themselves seen conversing with her by Jim Barker, but on returning to their claim, neither they nor Barker exhibited any insurrectionary excitement. Later on, Shuttleworth was found in possession of two bundles of freshly rolled corn-husk cigarettes, and promised to get his partner some the next day, but that gentleman anticipated him. By nightfall nearly all Buckeye had passed in procession before the little house without exhibiting any indignation or protest. That night, however, it seemed as if the events for which the Committee was waiting were really impending. The adult female population of Buckeye consisted of seven women — wives of miners. That they would submit tamely to the introduction of a young, pretty, and presumably dangerous member of their own sex was not to be supposed. But whatever protest they made did not pass beyond their conjugal seclusion, and was apparently not supported by their husbands. Two or three of them, under the pretext of sympathy of sex, secured interviews with the fair intruder, the result of which was not, however, generally known. But a few days later, Mrs. "Bob" Carpenter — a somewhat brick-dusty blonde — was observed wearing some black netting and a heavily flounced skirt, and Mrs. Shuttleworth in her next visit to Fiddletown wore her Paisley shawl affixed to her chestnut hair by a bunch of dog-roses, and wrapped like a plaid around her waist. The seven ladies of Buckeye, who had never before met, except on domestic errands to each other's houses or on Sunday attendance at the "First Methodist Church" at Fiddletown, now took to walking together, or in their husbands' company, along the upper bank of the river — the one boulevard of Buckeye. The third day after Miss Mendez' arrival they felt the necessity of immediate shopping

expeditions to Fiddletown. This operation had hitherto been confined to certain periods, and restricted to the laying in of stores of rough household stuffs; but it now apparently included a wider range and more ostentatious quality. Parks' Emporium no longer satisfied them, and this unexpected phase of the situation was practically brought home to the proprietor in the necessity of extending the more inoffensive and peaceful part of his stock. And when, towards the end of the week, a cart-load of pretty fixtures, mirrors, and furniture arrived at the tienda, there was a renewed demand at the Emporium for articles not in stock, and the consequent diverting of custom to Fiddletown. Buckeye found itself face to face with a hitherto undreamt of and preposterous proposition. It seemed that the advent of the strange woman, without having yet produced any appreciable effect upon the men, had already insidiously inveigled the adult female population into ostentatious extravagance.

At the end of a week the little adobe house was not only rendered habitable, but was even made picturesque by clean white curtains at its barred windows, and some bright, half-Moorish coloring of beams and rafters. Nearly the whole ground floor was given up to the saloon of the tienda, which consisted of a small counter at one side, containing bottles and glasses, and another, flanking it, with glass cases, containing cigars, pipes, and tobacco, while the centre of the room was given up to four or five small restaurant tables. The staff of Jovita was no longer limited to Sanchicha, but had been augmented by a little old man of indefinite antiquity who resembled an Aztec idol, and an equally old Mexican, who looked not unlike a brown-tinted and veined tobacco leaf himself, and might have stood for a sign. But the genius of the place, its omnipresent and all-pervading goddess, was Jovita! Smiling, joyous, indefatigable in suavity and attention; all-embra-

cing in her courtesies; frank of speech and eye; quick at repartee and deftly handling the slang of the day and the locality with a childlike appreciation and an infantine accent that seemed to redeem it from vulgarity or unfeminine boldness! Few could resist the volatile infection of her presence. A smile was the only tribute she exacted, and good humor the rule laid down for her guests. If it occasionally required some mental agility to respond to her banter, a Californian gathering was, however, seldom lacking in humor. Yet she was always the principal performer to an admiring audience. Perhaps there was security in this multitude of admirers; perhaps there was a saving grace in this humorous trifling. The passions are apt to be serious and solitary, and Jovita evaded them with a jest,—which, if not always delicate or witty, was effective in securing the laughter of the majority and the jealousy of none.

At the end of the week another peculiarity was noticed. There was a perceptible increase of the Mexican population, who had always hitherto avoided Buckeye. On Sunday an Irish priest from El Pásto said mass in a patched-up corner of the old Mission ruin opposite Rollinson's Ford. A few lounging "Excelsior" boys were equally astonished to see Jovita's red rose crest and black mantilla glide by, and followed her unvarying smile and jesting salutation up to the shadow of the crumbling portal. At vespers nearly all Buckeye, hitherto virtuously skeptical and good-humoredly secure in Works without Faith, made a point of attending; it was alleged by some to see if Jovita's glossy Indian-inky eyes would suffer aberration in her devotions. But the rose-crested head was never lifted from the well-worn prayer-book or the brown hands which held a certain poor little cheap rosary like a child's string of battered copper coins. Buckeye lounged by the wall through the service with respectful tolerance and uneasy shifting legs, and came away. But the apparently simple event did not end there.

It was unconsciously charged with a tremendous import to the settlement. For it was discovered the next day by Mrs. "Bob" Carpenter and Nan Shuttleworth that the Methodist Church at Fiddletown was too far away, and Buckeye ought to have a preacher of its own. Seats were fitted up in the loft of Carpenter's storehouse, where the Reverend Henry McCorkle held divine service, and instituted a Bible class. At the end of two weeks it appeared that Jovita's invasion — which was to bring dissipation and ruin to Buckeye — had indirectly brought two churches! A chilling doubt like a cold mist settled along the river. As the two rival processions passed on the third Sunday, Jo Bateman, who had been in the habit of reclining on that day in his shirt-sleeves under a tree, with a novel in his hand, looked gloomily after them. Then knocking the ashes from his pipe, he rose, shook hands with his partners, said apologetically that he had lately got into the habit of *respecting the Sabbath*, and was too old to change again, and so shook the red dust of Buckeye from his feet and departed.

As yet there had not been the slightest evidence of disorderly conduct on the part of the fair proprietress of the tienda, nor her customers, nor any drunkenness or riotous disturbance that could be at all attributed to her presence. There was, it is true, considerable hilarity, smoking, and some gambling there until a late hour, but this could not be said to interfere with the rest and comfort of other people. A clue to the mystery of so extraordinary a propriety was given by Jovita herself. One day she walked into Parks' Emporium and demanded an interview with the proprietor.

"You have made the rules for these Booki?"

"Yes — that is — I and my friends have."

"And when one shall not have mind the rule — when one have say, 'No! damn the rule,' what shall you make to him? Shall you aprison him?"

Mr. Parks hastened to say with a superior, yet engaging smile that it never had been necessary, as the rules were obligatory upon the honor and consent of all — and were never broken. "Except," he added, still more engagingly, "she would remember, in her case — with their consent."

"And your caballeros break not the rules?"

"No."

"Then they shall not break the rules of me — at *my* tienda! Look! I have made the rule that I shall not have a caballero drunk at my house; I have made the rule that I shall not sell him the aguardiente when he have too mooch. I have made the rule that when he gamble too mooch, when he put up too mooch money, I say 'No!' I will not that he shall! I make one more rule: that he shall not quarrel nor fight in my house. When he quarrel and fight, I say, 'Go! Vamos! Get out!'"

"And very good rules they are too, Miss Mendez."

Jovita fixed her shining black eyes on the smiling Parks. "And when he say, 'No, nevarre, damn the rules!' When he come drunk, remain drunk, play high and fight, *you* will not poonish him? *you* will not take him out?"

"Well, you see, the fact is, I have not the power."

"Are you not the Alcalde?"

"No. There is a Justice of the Peace at Fiddletown, but even he could do nothing to enforce your rules. But if anything should happen, you can make a complaint to him."

"Bueno. You have not the power; *I* have. I make not the complaint to Fiddletown. I make the complaint to José Perez, to Manuel, to Antonio, to Sanchicha — she is a strong one! I say 'Chook him out.' They chook him out! they remove him! He does not r-r-remain. Enough. Bueno. Gracias, señor, good-a-by!"

She was gone. For the next four days Parks was in a state of some anxiety — but it appeared unnecessarily so.

Whether the interview had become known along the river did not transpire, but there seemed to be no reason for Miss Mendez to enforce her rules. It was said that once, when Thompson of Angels was a little too noisy, he had been quietly conducted by his friends from the tienda without the intervention of José. The frequenters of the saloon became its police.

Yet the event — long protracted — came at last! It was a dry, feverish, breezeless afternoon, when the short, echoless explosion of a revolver puffed out on the river, followed by another, delivered so rapidly that they seemed rolled into one. There was no mistaking that significant repetition. *One* shot might have been an accident; *two* meant intention. The men dropped their picks and shovels and ran — ran as they never before ran in Buckeye — ran mechanically, blindly groping at their belts and pockets for the weapons that hung there no longer; ran aimlessly, as to purpose, but following instinctively with hurried breath and quivering nostrils the cruel scent of powder and blood. Ran until, reaching the tienda, the foremost stumbled over the body of Shuttleworth; came upon the half-sitting, half-leaning figure of Saunders against its adobe wall! The doors were barred and closed, and even as the crowd charged furiously forward, a window was sharply shut above, in their very face.

"Stand back, gentlemen! Lift him up. What 's the row? What is it, Saunders? Who did it? Speak, man!"

But Saunders, who was still supporting himself against the wall, only looked at them with a singular and half-apologetic smile, and then leaned forward as if to catch the eye of Shuttleworth, who was recovering consciousness in the uplifted arms of his companions. But neither spoke.

"It 's some d—d Greaser inside!" said Thompson, with sudden ferocity. "Some of her cursed crew! Break down the doors, boys!"

"Stop!"

It was the voice of Shuttleworth, speaking with an effort. He was hard hit, somewhere in the groin; pain and blood were coming with consciousness and movement, and his face was ghastly. Yet there was the same singular smile of embarrassment which Saunders had worn, and a touch of invincible disgust in his voice as he stammered quickly, "Don't be d—d fools! It 's no one in *there.* It 's only me and *him!* He 'll tell you that. Won't you, Saunders?"

"Yes," said Saunders, leaning anxiously forward, with a brightening face. "D—n it all — can't you see? It 's only — only us."

"You and me, that 's all," repeated Shuttleworth, with a feverish laugh. "Only our d—d foolishness! Think of it, boys! He gave me the lie, and I drew!"

"Both of us full, you know — reg'lar beasts," said Saunders, sinking back against the wall. "Kick me, somebody, and finish me off."

"I don't see any weapons here," said Brace gravely, examining the ground.

"They 're inside," said Shuttleworth, with tremulous haste. "We began it in there — just like hogs, you know! Did n't we, Saunders?" bitterly.

"You bet," said Saunders faintly. "Reg'lar swine."

Parks looked graver still, and as he passed a handkerchief around the wounded man's thigh, said, "But I don't see where you got your pistols, and how you got out here."

"Clinched, you know; sorter rolled over out here — and — and — oh, d—n it — don't talk!"

"He means," said Shuttleworth still feebly, "that we — we — grabbed *another man's* six-shooter and — and — he that is — and they — he — he and me grabbed each other, and — don't you see" — but here, becoming more involved and much weaker, he discreetly fainted away.

And that was all Buckeye ever knew of the affair! For they refused to speak of it again, and Dr. Duchesne gravely forbade any further interrogation. Both men's revolvers were found undischarged in their holsters, hanging in their respective cabins. The balls which were afterwards extracted from the two men singularly disappeared; Dr. Duchesne asserting with a grim smile that they had swallowed them.[1]

Nothing could be ascertained of the facts at the tienda, which at that hour of the day appeared to have been empty of customers, and was occupied only by Miss Mendez and her retainers. All surmises as to the real cause of the quarrel and the reason for the reticence of the two belligerents were suddenly and unexpectedly stopped by their departure from Buckeye as soon as their condition permitted, on the alleged opinion of Dr. Duchesne that the air of the river was dangerous to their convalescence. The momentary indignation against the tienda which the two combatants had checked, eventually subsided altogether. After all, the fight had taken place *outside;* it was not even proven that the provocation had been given *at* the tienda! Its popularity was undiminished.

PART III

It was the end of the rainy season, and a wet night. Brace and Parks were looking from the window over the swollen river, with faces quite as troubled as the stream below. Nor was the prospect any longer the same. In the past two years Buckeye had grown into a city. They could now count a half-dozen church spires from the win-

[1] It was a frontier superstition that the ball extracted from a gunshot wound, if swallowed by the wounded man, prevented inflammation or any supervening complications.

dow of the three-storied brick building which had taken the place of the old wooden Emporium, but they could also count the brilliantly lit windows of an equal number of saloons and gambling-houses which glittered through the rain, or, to use the words of a local critic, "Shone seven nights in the week to the Gospel shops' *one!*" A difficulty had arisen which the two men had never dreamed of, and a struggle had taken place between the two rival powers, which was developing a degree of virulence and intolerance on both sides that boded no good to Buckeye. The disease which its infancy had escaped had attacked its adult growth with greater violence. The new American saloons which competed with Jovita Mendez' Spanish venture had substituted a brutal masculine sincerity for her veiled feminine methods. There was higher play, deeper drinking, darker passion. Yet the opposition, after the fashion of most reformers, were casting back to the origin of the trouble in Jovita, and were confounding principles and growth. "If it had not been for her the rule would never have been broken." "If there was to be a cleaning out of the gambling-houses, she must go first!"

The sounds of a harp and a violin played in the nearest saloon struggled up to them with the opening and shutting of its swinging baize inner doors. There was boisterous chanting from certain belated revelers in the next street which had no such remission. The brawling of the stream below seemed to be echoed in the uneasy streets; the quiet of the old days had departed with the sedate, encompassing woods that no longer fringed the river-bank; the restful calm of Nature had receded before the dusty outskirts of the town.

"It 's mighty unfortunate, too," said Brace moodily, "that Shuttleworth and Saunders, who haven't been in the place since their row, have come over from Fiddletown to-day, and are hanging around town. They haven't said

anything that I know of, but their *presence* is quite enough to revive the old feeling against her shop. The Committee," he added bitterly, "will be sure to say that not only the first gambling, but the first shooting in Buckeye took place there. If they get up that story again — no matter how quiet *she* has become since — no matter what *you* may say as mayor — it will go hard with her. What 's that now?"

They listened breathlessly. Above the brawling of the river, the twanging of the harp-player, and the receding shouts of the revelers, they could hear the hollow wooden sidewalks resounding with the dull, monotonous trampling of closely following feet. Parks rose with a white face.

"Brace!"

"Yes!"

"Will you stand by me — and *her?*"

"Stand by *you and her?* Eh? What? Good God! Parks! — you don't mean to say you — it 's gone as far as *that?*"

"Will you or won't you?"

The sound of the trampling had changed to a shuffling on the pavement below, and then footsteps began to ascend the stairs.

Brace held out his hand quickly and grasped that of Parks as the door opened to half a dozen men. They were evidently the ringleaders of the crowd below. There was no hesitation or doubt in their manner; the unswerving directness which always characterized those illegal demonstrations lent it something of dignity. Nevertheless, Carpenter, the spokesman, flushed slightly before Parks' white, determined face.

"Come, Parks, you know what we 're after," he said bluntly. "We did n't come here to parley. We know *your* sentiments and what *you* think is your duty. We know what we consider *ours* — and so do you. But we 're

here to give you a chance, either as mayor, or, if you prefer it, as the oldest citizen here, to take a hand in our business to-night. We 're not ashamed of what we 're going to do, and we 're willing to abide by it; so there 's no reason why we should n't speak above board of it to you. We even invite you to take part in our 'last call' to-night at the Hall."

"Go!" whispered Brace quickly, "*you 'll gain time!*"

Parks' face changed, and he turned to Carpenter. "Enough," he said gravely. "I reserve what I have to say of these proceedings till I join you there." He stopped, whispered a few words to Brace, and then disappeared as the men descended the stairs, and, joining the crowd on the pavement, proceeded silently towards the Town Hall. There was nothing in the appearance of that decorous procession to indicate its unlawful character or the recklessness with which it was charged.

There were thirty or forty men already seated in the Hall. The meeting was brief and to the point. The gambling saloons were to be "cleaned out" that night, the tables and appliances thrown into the street and burnt, the doors closed, and the gamblers were to be conducted to the outskirts of the town and forbidden to enter it again on pain of death.

"Does this yer refer to Jovita Mendez' saloon?" asked a voice.

To their surprise the voice was not Parks' but Shuttleworth's. It was also a matter to be noted that he stood a little forward of the crowd, and that there was a corresponding movement of a dozen or more men from Fiddletown who apparently were part of the meeting.

The chairman (No. 10) said there was to be no exception, and certainly not for the originator of disorder in Buckeye! He was surprised that the question should be asked by No. 72, who was an old resident of Buckeye, and

who, with No. 73, had suffered from the character of that woman's saloon.

"That 's jest it," said Shuttleworth, "and ez I reckon that *Saunders and me* did all the disorder there was, and had to turn ourselves out o' town on account of it, I don't see jest where *she* could come into this affair. Only," he turned and looked around him, "in one way! And that way, gentlemen, would be for her to come here and boot one half o' this kempany out o' town, and shoot the other half! You hear me! — that 's so!" He stopped, tugged a moment at his cravat and loosened his shirt-collar as if it impeded his utterance, and went on. "I 've got to say suthin' to you gentlemen about me and Saunders and this woman; I 've got to say suthin' that 's hard for a white man to say, and him a married man, too — I 've got to say that me and Saunders never had no *qu'ol*, never had *no fight* at her shop; I 've got to say that me and Saunders got shot by Jovita Mendez for *insultin' her* — for tryin' to treat her as if she was the common dirt of the turnpike — and served us right! I 've got to say that Saunders and me made a bet that for all her airs she was n't no better than she might be, and we went there drunk to try her — and that we got left, with two shots into us like hounds as we were! That 's so! — was n't it, Saunders?"

"With two shots inter us like hounds ez we were," repeated Saunders, with deliberate precision.

"And I 've got to say suthin' more, gen'lemen," continued Shuttleworth, now entirely removing his coat and vest, and apparently shaking himself free from any extraneous trammels. "I 've got to say this — I 've got to say that thar ain't a man in Buckeye, from Dirty Dick over yon to the mayor of this town, ez has n't tried the same thing on and got left — got left, without shootin' maybe, more 's the pity, but got left all the same! And I 've got to say," lifting his voice, "*that ef that 's what you call*

disorderliness in her — if that 's what yo'r turnin' this woman out o' town for — why " —

He stopped, absolutely breathless and gasping. For there was a momentary shock of surprise and shame, and then he was overborne by peal after peal of inextinguishable laughter. But it was the laughter that precipitated doubt, enlightened justice, cleared confusion, and — saved them!

In vain a few struggled to remind them that the question of the *other* saloons was still unaffected. It was lost in the motion enthusiastically put and carried that the Committee should instantly accompany Saunders and Shuttleworth to Jovita's saloon to make an apology in their presence. Five minutes later they halted hilariously before its door. But it was closed, dark, and silent!

Their sudden onset and alarm brought Sanchicha to the half-opened door. "Ah; yes! the señorita? Bueno! She had just left for Fiddletown with the Señor Parks, the honorable mayor. They had been married only a few moments before by the Reverend Mr. McCorkle!"

THE BELL-RINGER OF ANGEL'S

CHAPTER I

WHERE the North Fork of the Stanislaus River begins to lose its youthful grace, vigor, and agility, and broadens more maturely into the plain, there is a little promontory which at certain high stages of water lies like a small island in the stream. To the strongly marked heroics of Sierran landscape it contrasts a singular, pastoral calm. White and gray mosses from the overhanging rocks and feathery alders trail their filaments in its slow current, and between the woodland openings there are glimpses of vivid velvet sward, even at times when the wild oats and "wire-grasses" of the plains are already yellowing. The placid river, unstained at this point by mining sluices or mill drift, runs clear under its contemplative shadows. Originally the camping-ground of a Digger Chief, it passed from his tenancy with the American rifle bullet that terminated his career. The pioneer who thus succeeded to its attractive calm gave way in turn to a well-directed shot from the revolver of a quartz-prospector, equally impressed with the charm of its restful tranquillity. How long he might have enjoyed its riparian seclusion is not known. A sudden rise of the river one March night quietly removed him, together with the overhanging post oak beneath which he was profoundly but unconsciously meditating. The demijohn of whiskey was picked up further down. But no other suggestion of these successive evictions was ever visible in the repose-ful serenity of the spot.

It was later occupied, and a cabin built upon the spot, by one Alexander McGee, better known as "the Bell-ringer of Angel's." This euphonious title, however, which might have suggested a consistently peaceful occupation, referred to his accuracy of aim at a mechanical target, where the piercing of the bull's-eye was celebrated by the stroke of a bell. It is probable that this singular proficiency kept his investment of that gentle seclusion unchallenged. At all events it was uninvaded. He shared it only with the birds. Perhaps some suggestion of nest-building may have been in his mind, for one pleasant spring morning he brought hither a wife. It was his *own;* and in this way he may be said to have introduced that morality which is supposed to be the accompaniment and reflection of pastoral life. Mrs. McGee's red petticoat was sometimes seen through the trees — a cheerful bit of color. Mrs. McGee's red cheeks, plump little figure, beribboned hat, and brown, still girlish braids were often seen at sunset on the river-bank, in company with her husband, who seemed to be pleased with the discreet and distant admiration that followed them. Strolling under the bland shadows of the cottonwoods, by the fading gold of the river, he doubtless felt that peace which the mere world cannot give, and which fades not away before the clear, accurate eye of the perfect marksman.

Their nearest neighbors were the two brothers Wayne, who took up a claim, and built themselves a cabin on the river-bank near the promontory. Quiet, simple men, suspected somewhat of psalm-singing, and undue retirement on Sundays, they attracted but little attention. But when, through some original conception or painstaking deliberation, they turned the current of the river so as to restrict the overflow between the promontory and the river-bank, disclosing an auriferous "bar" of inconceivable richness, and establishing their theory that it was really the former

channel of the river, choked and diverted through ages of alluvial drift, they may be said to have changed, also, the fortunes of the little settlement. Popular feeling and the new prosperity which dawned upon the miners recognized the two brothers by giving the name of Wayne's Bar to the infant settlement and its post-office. The peaceful promontory, although made easier of access, still preserved its calm seclusion, and pretty Mrs. McGee could contemplate through the leaves of her bower the work going on at its base, herself unseen. Nevertheless, this Arcadian retreat was being slowly and surely invested; more than that, the character of its surroundings was altered, and the complexion of the river had changed. The Wayne engines on the point above had turned the drift and débris into the current that now thickened and ran yellow around the wooded shore. The fringes of this Eden were already tainted with the color of gold.

It is doubtful, however, if Mrs. McGee was much affected by this sentimental reflection, and her husband, in a manner, lent himself to the desecration of his exclusive domain by accepting a claim along the shore — tendered by the conscientious Waynes in compensation for restricting the approach to the promontory — and thus participated in the fortunes of the Bar. Mrs. McGee amused herself by watching from her eyrie, with a presumably childish interest, the operations of the red-shirted brothers on the Bar; her husband, however, always accompanying her when she crossed the Bar to the bank. Some two or three other women — wives of miners — had joined the camp, but it was evident that McGee was as little inclined to intrust his wife to their companionship as to that of their husbands. An opinion obtained that McGee, being an old resident, with alleged high connections in Angel's, was inclined to be aristocratic and exclusive.

Meantime, the two brothers who had founded the for

tunes of the Bar were accorded an equally high position, with an equal amount of reserve. Their ways were decidedly not those of the other miners, and were as efficacious in keeping them from familiar advances as the reputation of Mr. McGee was in isolating his wife. Madison Wayne, the elder, was tall, well-knit and spare, reticent in speech and slow in deduction; his brother, Arthur, was of rounder outline, but smaller and of a more delicate and perhaps a more impressible nature. It was believed by some that it was within the range of possibility that Arthur would yet be seen "taking his cocktail like a white man," or "dropping his scads" at draw poker. At present, however, they seemed content to spend their evenings in their own cabin, and their Sundays at a grim Presbyterian tabernacle in the next town, to which they walked ten miles, where, it was currently believed, "hell fire was ladled out free," and "infants damned for nothing." When they did not go to meeting it was also believed that the minister came to them, until it was ascertained that the sound of sacred recitation overheard in their cabin was simply Madison Wayne reading the Bible to his younger brother. McGee is said to have stopped on one of these occasions — unaccompanied by his wife — before their cabin, moving away afterwards with more than his usual placid contentment.

It was about eleven o'clock one morning, and Madison Wayne was at work alone on the Bar. Clad in a dark gray jersey and white duck trousers rolled up over high india-rubber boots, he looked not unlike a peaceful fisherman digging stakes for his nets, as he labored in the ooze and gravel of the still half-reclaimed river-bed. He was far out on the Bar, within a stone's throw of the promontory. Suddenly his quick ear caught an unfamiliar cry and splash. Looking up hastily, he saw Mrs. McGee's red petticoat in the water under the singularly agitated boughs of an overhanging tree. Madison Wayne ran to the bank,

threw off his heavy boots, and sprang into the stream. A few strokes brought him to Mrs. McGee's petticoat, which, as he had wisely surmised, contained Mrs. McGee, who was still clinging to a branch of the tree. Grasping her waist with one hand and the branch with the other, he obtained a foothold on the bank, and dragged her ashore. A moment later they both stood erect and dripping at the foot of the tree.

"Well?" said the lady.

Wayne glanced around their seclusion with his habitual caution, slightly knit his brows perplexedly, and said, "You fell in?"

"I did n't do nothin' of the sort. I *jumped* in."

Wayne again looked around him, as if expecting her companion, and squeezed the water out of his thick hair. "Jumped in?" he repeated slowly. "What for?"

"To make you come over here, Mad Wayne," she said, with a quick laugh, putting her arms akimbo.

They stood looking at each other, dripping like two river-gods. Like them, also, Wayne had apparently ignored the fact that his trousers were rolled up above his bare knees, and Mrs. McGee that her red petticoat clung closely to her rather pretty figure. But he quickly recovered himself. "You had better go in and change your clothes," he said, with grave concern. "You 'll take cold."

She only shook herself disdainfully. "I 'm all right," she said; "but *you*, Mad Wayne, what do you mean by not speaking to me — not knowing me? You can't say that I 've changed like that." She passed her hand down her long dripping braids as if to press the water from them, and yet with a half-coquettish suggestion in the act.

Something struggled up into the man's face which was not there before. There was a new light in his grave eyes. "You look the same," he said slowly; "but you are married — you have a husband."

"You think that changes a girl?" she said, with a laugh. "That 's where all you men slip up! You 're afraid of his rifle — *that 's* the change that bothers you, Mad."

"You know I care little for carnal weapons," he said quietly. She *did* know it; but it is the privilege of the sex to invent its facts and then to graciously abandon them as if they were only arguments. "Then why do you keep off from me? Why do you look the other way when I pass?" she said quickly.

"Because you are married," he said slowly.

She again shook the water from her like a Newfoundland dog. "That 's it. You 're mad because I got married. You 're mad because I would n't marry you and your church over on the Cross-Roads, and sing hymns with you and become *Sister* Wayne. You wanted me to give up dancing and buggy ridin' Sundays — and you 're just mad because I did n't. Yes, mad — just mean, baby mad, Mr. Maddy Wayne, for all your *Christian* resignation! That 's what 's the matter with you." Yet she looked very pretty and piquant in her small spitefulness, which was still so general and superficial that she seemed to shake it out of her wet petticoats in a vicious flap that disclosed her neat ankles.

"You preferred McGee to me," he said grimly. "I did n't blame you."

"Who said I *preferred* him?" she retorted quickly. "Much you know!" Then, with swift feminine abandonment of her position, she added, with a little laugh, "It 's all the same whether you 're guarded with a rifle or a Church Presbytery, only" —

"Only what?" said Madison earnestly.

"There 's men who 'd risk being *shot* for a girl, that could n't stand psalm-singin' palaver."

The quick expression of pain that passed over his hard,

dark face seemed only to heighten her pretty mischievousness. But he simply glanced again around the solitude, passed his hand over his wet sleeve, and said, "I must go now; your husband would n't like me being here."

"He 's workin' in the claim, — the claim *you* gave him," said Mrs. McGee, with cheerful malice. "Wonder what he 'd say if he knew it was given to him by the man who used to spark his wife only two years ago? How does that suit your Christian conscience, Mad?"

"I should have told him, had I not believed that everything was over between us, or that it was possible that you and me should ever meet again," he returned in a tone so measured that the girl seemed to hear the ring of the conventicle in it.

"Should you, *Brother* Wayne?" she said, imitating him. "Well, let me tell you that you are the one man on the Bar that Sandy has taken a fancy to."

Madison's sallow cheek colored a little, but he did not speak.

"Well!" continued Mrs. McGee impatiently. "I don't believe he 'd object to your comin' here to see me — if you cared.".

"But I would n't care to come, unless he first knew that I had been once engaged to you," said Madison gravely.

"Perhaps he might not think as much of that as you do," retorted the woman pertly. "Every one is n't as straitlaced as you, and every girl has had one or two engagements. But do as you like — stay at home if you want to, and sing psalms and read the Scriptures to that younger brother of yours! All the same, I 'm thinkin' he 'd rather be out with the boys."

"My brother is God-fearing and conscientious," said Madison quickly. "You do not know him. You have never seen him."

"No," said Mrs. McGee shortly. She then gave a

little shiver (that was, however, half simulated) in her wet garments, and added, "*One* saint was enough for me; I could n't stand the whole church, Mad."

"You are catching cold," he said quickly, his whole face brightening with a sudden tenderness that seemed to transfigure the dark features. "I am keeping you here when you should be changing your clothes. Go, I beg you, at once."

She stood still provokingly, with an affectation of wiping her arms and shoulders and sopping her wet dress with clusters of moss.

"Go, please do — Safie, please!"

"Ah!" — she drew a quick, triumphant breath. "Then you 'll come again to see me, Mad?"

"Yes," he said slowly, and even more gravely than before.

"But you must let me show you the way out — round under those trees — where no one can see you come." She held out her hand.

"I 'll go the way I came," he said quietly, swinging himself silently from the nearest bough into the stream. And before she could utter a protest he was striking out as silently, hand over hand, across the current.

CHAPTER II

A WEEK later Madison Wayne was seated alone in his cabin. His supper-table had just been cleared by his Chinese coolie, as it was getting late, and the setting sun, which for half an hour had been persistently making a vivid beacon of his windows for the benefit of wayfarers along the river-bank, had at last sunk behind the cotton-woods. His head was resting on his hand; the book he had been reading when the light faded was lying open on the table before him. In this attitude he became aware of a hesitating step on the gravel outside his open door. He had been so absorbed that the approach of any figure along the only highway — the river-bank — had escaped his observation. Looking up, he discovered that Mr. Alexander McGee was standing in the doorway, his hand resting lightly on the jamb. A sudden color suffused Wayne's cheek; his hand reached for his book, which he drew towards him hurriedly, yet half automatically, as he might have grasped some defensive weapon.

The Bell-ringer of Angel's noticed the act, but not the blush, and nodded approvingly. "Don't let me disturb ye. I was only meanderin' by and reckoned I 'd say 'How do?' in passin'." He leaned gently back against the door-post, to do which comfortably he was first obliged to shift the revolver on his hip. The sight of the weapon brought a slight contraction to the brows of Wayne, but he gravely said, "Won't you come in?"

"It ain't your prayin' time?" said McGee politely.

"No."

"Nor you ain't gettin' up lessons outer the Book?" he continued thoughtfully.

"No."

"Cos it don't seem, so to speak, you see, the square thing to be botherin' a man when he might be doin' suthin' else, don't you see? You understand what I mean?"

It was his known peculiarity that he always seemed to be suffering from an inability to lucid expression, and the fear of being misunderstood in regard to the most patent or equally the most unimportant details of his speech. All of which, however, was in very remarkable contrast to his perfectly clear and penetrating eyes.

Wayne gravely assured him that he was not interrupting him in any way.

"I often thought — that is, I had an idea, you understand what I mean — of stoppin' in passing. You and me, you see, are sorter alike; we don't seem to jibe in with the gin'ral gait o' the camp. You understand what I mean? We ain't in the game, eh? You see what I 'm after?"

Madison Wayne glanced half mechanically at McGee's revolver. McGee's clear eyes at once took in the glance.

"That 's it! You understand? You with them books of yours, and me with my shootin' iron — we 're sort o' different from the rest, and ought to be kinder like partners. You understand what I mean? We keep this camp in check. We hold a full hand, and don't stand no bluffing."

"If you mean there is some effect in Christian example and the life of a God-fearing man" — began Madison gravely.

"That 's it! God-fearin' or revolver-fearin', it amounts to the same when you come down to the hard pan and bedrock," interrupted McGee. "I ain't expectin' you to think much of my style, but I go a heap on yours, even if I can't play your game. And I sez to my wife, 'Safie,' — her that trots around with me sometimes, — I sez, 'Safie, I

oughter know that man, and shall. And I *want you* to know him.' Hol' on," he added quickly, as Madison rose with a flushed face and a perturbed gesture. "Ye don't understand! I see wot 's in your mind — don't you see? When I married my wife and brought her down here, knowin' this yer camp, I sez: 'No flirtin', no foolin', no philanderin' here, my dear! You 're young and don't know the ways o' men. The first man I see you talking with, I shoot. You need n't fear, my dear, for accidents. I kin shoot all round you, under your arm, across your shoulders, over your head and between your fingers, my dear, and never start skin or fringe or ruffle. But I don't miss *him*. You sorter understand what I mean,' sez I, 'so don't!' Ye noticed how my wife is respected, Mr. Wayne? Queen Victoria sittin' on her throne ain't in it with my Safie. But when I see *you* not herdin' with that cattle, never liftin' your eyes to me or Safie as we pass, never hangin' round the saloons and jokin', nor winkin', nor slingin' muddy stories about women, but prayin' and readin' Scripter stories, here along with your brother, I sez to myself, I sez, 'Sandy, ye kin take off your revolver and hang up your shot-gun when *he 's* around. For 'twixt *him* and your wife ain't no revolver, but the fear of God and hell and damnation and the world to come!' You understand what I mean, don't ye? Ye sorter follow my lead, eh? Ye can see what I 'm shootin' round, don't ye? So I want you to come up neighborly like, and drop in to see my wife."

Madison Wayne's face became set and hard again, but he advanced towards McGee with the book against his breast, and his finger between the leaves. "I already know your wife, Mr. McGee! I saw her before *you* ever met her. I was engaged to her; I loved her, and — as far as man may love the wife of another and keep the commands of this book — I love her still!"

To his surprise, McGee, whose calm eyes had never dimmed or blenched, after regarding him curiously, took the volume from him, laid it on the table, opened it, turned its leaves critically, said earnestly, "That 's the law here, is it?" and then held out his hand.

"Shake!"

Madison Wayne hesitated — and then grasped his hand.

"Ef I had known this," continued McGee, "I reckon I would n't have been so hard on Safie and so partikler. She 's better than I took her for — havin' had you for a beau! You understand what I mean. You follow me — don't ye? I allus kinder wondered why she took me, but sens you 've told me that *you* used to spark her, in your God-fearin' way, I reckon it kinder prepared her for *me*. You understand? Now you come up, won't ye?"

"I will call some evening with my brother," said Wayne embarrassedly.

"With which?" demanded McGee.

"My brother Arthur. We usually spend the evenings together."

McGee paused, leaned against the door-post, and, fixing his clear eyes on Wayne, said, "Ef it 's all the same to you, I 'd rather you did not bring him. You understand what I mean? You follow me; no other man but you and me. I ain't sayin' anything agin your brother, but you see how it is, don't you? Just me and you."

"Very well, I will come," said Wayne gloomily. But as McGee backed out of the door, he followed him, hesitatingly. Then, with an effort he seemed to recover himself, and said almost harshly, "I ought to tell you another thing — that I have seen and spoken to Mrs. McGee since she came to the Bar. She fell into the water last week, and I swam out and dragged her ashore. We talked and spoke of the past."

"She fell in," echoed McGee.

Wayne hesitated; then a murky blush came into his face as he slowly repeated, "She *fell* in."

McGee's eyes only brightened. "I have been too hard on her. She might have drowned ef you had n't took risks. You see? You understand what I mean? And she never let out anything about it — and never boasted o' *you* helpin' her out. All right — you 'll come along and see her agin." He turned and walked cheerfully away.

Wayne reëntered the cabin. He sat for a long time by the window until the stars came out above the river, and another star, with which he had been long familiar, took its place apparently in the heart of the wooded crest of the little promontory. Then the fringing woods on the opposite shore became a dark level line across the landscape, and the color seemed to fade out of the moist shining gravel before his cabin. Presently the silhouette of his dark face disappeared from the window, and Mr. McGee might have been gratified to know that he had slipped to his knees before the chair whereon he had been sitting, and that his head was bowed before it on his clasped hands. In a little while he rose again, and, dragging a battered old portmanteau from the corner, took out a number of letters tied up in a package, with which, from time to time, he slowly fed the flame that flickered on his hearth. In this way the windows of the cabin at times sprang into light, making a somewhat confusing beacon for the somewhat confused Arthur Wayne, who was returning from a visit to Angel's, and who had fallen into that slightly morose and irritated state which follows excessive hilarity, and is also apt to indicate moral misgivings.

But the last letter was burnt and the cabin quite dark when he entered. His brother was sitting by the slowly dying fire, and he trusted that in that uncertain light any observation of his expression or manner — of which he himself was uneasily conscious — would pass unheeded.

"You are late," said Madison gravely.

At which his brother rashly assumed the aggressive. He was no later than the others, and if the Rogers boys were good enough to walk with him for company he could n't run ahead of them just because his brother was waiting! He did n't want any supper, he had something at the Cross-Roads with the others. Yes! *whiskey*, if he wanted to know. People could n't keep coffee and temperance drinks just to please him and his brother, and he was n't goin' to insult the others by standing aloof. Anyhow, he had never taken the pledge, and as long as he had n't he could n't see why he should refuse a single glass. As it was, everybody said he was a milksop, and a tenderfoot, and he was just sick of it.

Madison rose and lit a candle and held it up before his brother's face. It was a handsome, youthful face that looked into his, flushed with the excitement of novel experiences and perhaps a more material stimulation. The little silken mustache was ostentatiously curled, the brown curls were redolent of bear's grease. Yet there was a certain boyish timidity and nervousness in the defiance of his blue eyes that momentarily touched the elder brother. "I 've been too hard with him," he said to himself, half consciously recalling what McGee had said of Safie. He put the candle down, laid his hand gently on Arthur's shoulder, and said with a certain cautious tenderness, "Come, Arty, sit down and tell me all about it."

Whereupon the mercurial Arthur, not only relieved of his nervousness but of his previous ethical doubts and remorse, became gay and voluble. He had finished his purchases at Angel's, and the storekeeper had introduced him to Colonel Starbottle, of Kentucky, as one of "the Waynes who had made Wayne's Bar famous." Colonel Starbottle had said in his pompous fashion — yet he was not such a bad fellow, after all — that the Waynes ought to be

represented in the Councils of the State, and that he, Starbottle, would be proud to nominate Madison for the next Legislature and run him, too. "And you know, really, Mad, if you mixed a little more with folks, and they were n't — well, sorter *afraid* of you — you could do it. Why, I 've made a heap o' friends over there, just by goin' round a little, and one of old Selvedge's girls — the storekeeper, you know — said from what she 'd heard of us she always thought I was about fifty, and turned up the whites of my eyes instead of the ends of my mustache! She 's mighty smart! Then the postmaster has got his wife and three daughters out from the States, and they 've asked me to come over to their church festival next week. It is n't our church, of course, but I suppose it 's all right."

This and much more with the volubility of relieved feelings. When he stopped, out of breath, Madison said, "I have had a visitor since you left — Mr. McGee."

"And his wife?" asked Arthur quickly.

Madison flushed slightly. "No; but he asked me to go and see her."

"That 's *her* doin', then," returned Arthur, with a laugh. "She 's always lookin' round the corners of her eyes at me when she passes. Why, John Rogers was joking me about her only yesterday, and said McGee would blow a hole through me some of these days if I did n't look out! Of course," he added, affectedly curling his mustache, "that 's nonsense! But you know how they talk, and she 's too pretty for that fellow McGee."

"She has found a careful helpmeet in her husband," said Madison sternly, "and it 's neither seemly nor Christian in you, Arthur, to repeat the idle, profane gossip of the Bar. I knew her before her marriage, and if she was not a professing Christian, she was, and is, a pure, good woman! Let us have no more of this."

Whether impressed by the tone of his brother's voice,

or only affected by his own mercurial nature, Arthur changed the subject to further voluble reminiscences of his trip to Angel's. Yet he did not seem embarrassed nor disconcerted when his brother, in the midst of his speech, placed the candle and the Bible on the table, with two chairs before it. He listened to Madison's monotonous reading of the evening exercise with equally monotonous respect. Then they both arose, without looking at each other, but with equally set and stolid faces, and knelt down before their respective chairs, clasping the back with both hands, and occasionally drawing the hard, wooden frames against their breasts convulsively, as if it were a penitential act. It was the elder brother who that night prayed aloud. It was his voice that rose higher by degrees above the low roof and encompassing walls, the level river camp lights that trembled through the window, the dark belt of riverside trees, and the light on the promontory's crest — up to the tranquil, passionless stars themselves.

With those confidences to his Maker this chronicle does not lie — obtrusive and ostentatious though they were in tone and attitude. Enough that they were a general arraignment of humanity, the Bar, himself, and his brother, and indeed much that the same Maker had created and permitted. That through this hopeless denunciation still lingered some human feeling and tenderness might have been shown by the fact that at its close his hands trembled and his face was bedewed by tears. And his brother was so deeply affected that he resolved hereafter to avoid all evening prayers.

CHAPTER III

It was a week later that Madison Wayne and Mr. McGee were seen, to the astonishment of the Bar, leisurely walking together in the direction of the promontory. Here they disappeared, entering a damp fringe of willows and laurels that seemed to mark its limits, and gradually ascending some thickly wooded trail, until they reached its crest, which, to Madison's surprise, was cleared and open, and showed an acre or two of rude cultivation. Here, too, stood the McGees' conjugal home — a small, four-roomed house, but so peculiar and foreign in aspect that it at once challenged even Madison's abstracted attention. It was a tiny Swiss châlet, built in sections, and originally packed in cases, — one of the early importations from Europe to California after the gold discovery, when the country was supposed to be a woodless wilderness. Mr. McGee explained, with his usual laborious care, how he had bought it at Marysville, not only for its picturesqueness, but because in its unsuggestive packing-cases it offered no indication to the curious miners, and could be put up by himself and a single uncommunicative Chinaman, without any one else being aware of its existence. There was, indeed, something quaint in this fragment of Old World handicraft, with its smooth-jointed paneling, in two colors, its little lozenge fretwork, its lapped roof, overhanging eaves, and miniature gallery. Inartistic as Madison was — like most men of rigidly rectangular mind and principle — and accustomed to the bleak and economic sufficiency of the Californian miner's cabin, he was touched strangely by its novel grace and

freshness. It reminded him of *her;* he had a new respect for this rough, sinful man who had thus idealized his wife in her dwelling. Already a few madeira-vines and a Cherokee rose clambered up the gallery. And here Mrs. McGee was sitting.

In the face that she turned upon the two men Madison could see that she was not expecting them, and even in the slight curiosity with which she glanced at her husband, that evidently he had said nothing of his previous visit or invitation. And this conviction became certainty at Mr. McGee's first words.

"I 've brought you an ole friend, Safie. He used to spark ye once at Angel's afore my time — he told me so; he picked ye outer the water here — he told me that, too. Ye mind that I said afore that he was the only man I wanted ter know; I reckon now it seems the square thing that he should be the one man *you* wanted ter know, too. You understand what I mean — you follow me, don't you?"

Whether or not Mrs. McGee *did* follow him, she exhibited neither concern, solicitude, nor the least embarrassment. An experienced lover might have augured ill from this total absence of self-consciousness. But Madison was not an experienced lover. He accepted her amused smile as a recognition of his feelings, trembled at the touch of her cool hands, as if it had been a warm pressure, and scarcely dared to meet her maliciously laughing eyes. When he had followed Mr. McGee to the little gallery, the previous occupation of Mrs. McGee when they arrived was explained. From that slight elevation there was a perfect view over the whole landscape and river below; the Bar stretched out as a map at her feet; in that clear, transparent air she could see every movement and gesture of Wayne's brother, all unconscious of that surveillance, at work on the Bar. For an instant Madison's sallow cheek reddened, he knew not

why; a remorseful feeling that he ought to be there with Arthur came over him. Mrs. McGee's voice seemed to answer his thought. "You can see everything that 's going on down there without being seen yourself. It 's good fun for me sometimes. The other day I saw that young Carpenter hanging round Mrs. Rogers's cabin in the bush when old Rogers was away. And I saw her creep out and join him, never thinking any one could see her!"

She laughed, seeking Madison's averted eyes, yet scarcely noticing his suddenly contracted brows. Mr. McGee alone responded.

"That 's why," he said, explanatorily, to Madison, "I don't allow to have my Safie go round with those women. Not as I ever see anything o' that sort goin' on, or keer to look, but on gin'ral principles. You understand what I mean."

"That 's your brother over there, is n't it?" said Mrs. McGee, turning to Madison and calmly ignoring her husband's explanation, as she indicated the distant Arthur. "Why did n't you bring him along with you?"

Madison hesitated, and looked at McGee. "He was n't asked," said that gentleman cheerfully. "One 's company, two 's none! You don't know him, my dear; and this yer ain't a gin'ral invitation to the Bar. You follow me?"

To this Mrs. McGee made no comment, but proceeded to show Madison over the little cottage. Yet in a narrow passage she managed to touch his hand, lingered to let her husband precede them from one room to another, and once or twice looked meaningly into his eyes over McGee's shoulder. Disconcerted and embarrassed, he tried to utter a few commonplaces, but so constrainedly that even McGee presently noticed it. And the result was still more embarrassing.

"Look yer," he said, suddenly turning to them both. "I reckon as how you two wanter talk over old times, and I 'll just meander over to the claim, and do a spell o'

work. Don't mind *me*. And if *he*" — indicating Madison with his finger — "gets on ter religion, don't you mind him. It won't hurt you, Safie, — no more nor my revolver, — but it 's pow'ful persuadin', and you understand me? You follow me? Well, so long!"

He turned away quickly, and was presently lost among the trees. For an instant the embarrassed Madison thought of following him; but he was confronted by Mrs. McGee's wicked eyes and smiling face between him and the door. Composing herself, however, with a simulation of perfect gravity she pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Brother Wayne. If you 're going to convert me, it may take some time, you know, and you might as well make yourself comfortable. As for me, I 'll take the anxious bench." She laughed with a certain girlishness, which he well remembered, and leaped to a sitting posture on the table with her hands on her knees, swinging her smart shoes backwards and forwards below it.

Madison looked at her in hopeless silence, with a pale, disturbed face and shining eyes.

"Or, if you want to talk as we used to talk, Mad, when we sat on the front steps at Angel's and pa and ma went inside to give us a show, ye can hop up alongside o' me." She made a feint of gathering her skirts beside her.

"Safie!" broke out the unfortunate man, in a tone that seemed to increase in formal solemnity with his manifest agitation, "this is impossible. The laws of God that have joined you and this man" —

"Oh, it 's the prayer-meeting, is it?" said Safie, settling her skirts again, with affected resignation. "Go on."

"Listen, Safie," said Madison, turning despairingly towards her. "Let us for His sake, let us for the sake of our dear blessed past, talk together earnestly and prayerfully. Let us take this time to root out of our feeble hearts all yearnings that are not prompted by Him —

yearnings that your union with this man makes impossible and sinful. Let us for the sake of the past take counsel of each other, even as brother and sister."

"Sister McGee!" she interrupted mockingly. "It was n't as brother and sister you made love to me at Angel's."

"No! I loved you then, and would have made you my wife."

"And you don't love me any more," she said, audaciously darting a wicked look into his eyes, "only because I did n't marry you? And you think that Christian?"

"You know I love you as I have loved you always," he said passionately.

"Hush!" she said mockingly; "suppose he should hear you."

"He knows it!" said Madison bitterly. "*I* told him all!"

She stared at him fixedly.

"You have — told — him — that — you *still* love me?" she repeated slowly.

"Yes, or I would n't be here now. It was due to him — to my own conscience."

"And what did he say?"

"He insisted upon my coming, and, as God is my Judge and witness — he seemed satisfied and content."

She drew her pretty lips together with a long whistle, and then leaped from the table. Her face was hard and her eyes were bright as she went to the window and looked out. He followed her timidly.

"Don't touch me," she said, sharply striking away his proffered hand. He turned with a flushed cheek and walked slowly towards the door. Her laugh stopped him.

"Come! I reckon that squeezin' hands ain't no part of your contract with Sandy?" she said, glancing down at her own. "Well, so you 're goin'?"

"I only wished to talk seriously and prayerfully with you for a few moments, Safie, and then — to see you no more."

"And how would that suit him," she said dryly, "if he wants your company here? Then, just because you can't convert me and bring me to your ways of thinkin' in one visit, I suppose you think it is Christian-like to run away like this! Or do you suppose that, if you turn tail now, he won't believe that your Christian strength and Christian resignation is all humbug?"

Madison dropped into the chair, put his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands. She came a little nearer, and laid her hand lightly on his arm. He made a movement as if to take it, but she withdrew it impatiently.

"Come," she said brusquely; "now you 're in for it you must play the game out. He trusts you; if he sees you can't trust yourself, he 'll shoot you on sight. That don't frighten you? Well, perhaps this will then! He 'll *say* your religion is a sham and you a hypocrite — and everybody will believe him. How do you like that, Brother Wayne? How will that help the Church? Come! You 're a pair of cranks together; but he 's got the whip-hand of you this time. All you can do is to keep up to his idea of you. Put a bold face on it, and come here as often as you can — the oftener the better; the sooner you 'll both get sick of each other — and of *me*. That 's what you 're both after, ain't it? Well! I can tell you now, you need n't either of you be the least afraid of me."

She walked away to the window again, not angrily, but smoothing down the folds of her bright print dress as if she were wiping her hands of her husband and his guest. Something like a very material and manlike sense of shame struggled up through his crust of religion. He stammered, "You don't understand me, Safie."

"Then talk of something I do understand," she said

pertly. "Tell me some news of Angel's. Your brother was over there the other day. He made himself quite popular with the young ladies — so I hear from Mrs. Selvedge. You can tell me as we walk along the bank towards Sandy's claim. It 's just as well that you should move on now, as it 's your *first* call, and next time you can stop longer." She went to the corner of the room, removed her smart slippers, and put on a pair of walking-shoes, tying them, with her foot on a chair, in a quiet disregard of her visitor's presence; took a brown holland sunbonnet from the wall, clapped it over her browner hair and hanging braids, and tied it under her chin with apparently no sense of coquetry in the act — becoming though it was — and without glancing at him. Alas for Madison's ethics! The torment of her worldly speech and youthful contempt was nothing to this tacit ignoring of the manhood of her lover — this silent acceptance of him as something even lower than her husband. He followed her with a burning cheek and a curious revolting of his whole nature that it is to be feared were scarcely Christian. The willows opened to let them pass and closed behind them.

An hour later Mrs. McGee returned to her leafy bower alone. She took off her sunbonnet, hung it on its nail on the wall, shook down her braids, took off her shoes, stained with the mud of her husband's claim, and put on her slippers. Then she ascended to her eyrie in the little gallery, and gazed smilingly across the sunlit Bar. The two gaunt shadows of her husband and lover, linked like twins, were slowly passing along the river-bank on their way to the eclipsing obscurity of the cottonwoods. Below her — almost at her very feet — the unconscious Arthur Wayne was pushing his work on the river-bed, far out to the promontory. The sunlight fell upon his vivid scarlet shirt, his bared throat, and head clustering with perspiring curls. The same sunlight fell upon Mrs. McGee's brown head too.

and apparently put a wicked fancy inside it. She ran to her bedroom, and returned with a mirror from its wall, and, after some trials in getting the right angle, sent a searching reflection upon the spot where Arthur was at work.

For an instant a diamond flash played around him. Then he lifted his head and turned it curiously towards the crest above him. But the next moment he clapped his hands over his dazzled but now smiling eyes, as Mrs. McGee, secure in her leafy obscurity, fell back and laughed to herself, like a very schoolgirl.

It was three weeks later, and Madison Wayne was again sitting alone in his cabin. This solitude had become of more frequent occurrence lately, since Arthur had revolted and openly absented himself from his religious devotions for lighter diversions of the Bar. Keenly as Madison felt his defection, he was too much preoccupied with other things to lay much stress upon it, and the sting of Arthur's relapse to worldliness and folly lay in his own consciousness that it was partly his fault. He could not chide his brother when he felt that his own heart was absorbed in his neighbor's wife, and although he had rigidly adhered to his own crude ideas of self-effacement and loyalty to McGee, he had been again and again a visitor at his house. It was true that Mrs. McGee had made this easier by tacitly accepting his conditions of their acquaintanceship, by seeming more natural, by exhibiting a gayety, and at times even a certain gentleness and thoughtfulness of conduct that delighted her husband and astonished her lover. Whether this wonderful change had really been effected by the latter's gloomy theology and still more hopeless ethics, he could not say. She certainly showed no disposition to imitate their formalities, nor seemed to be impressed by them on the rare occasions when he offered them. Yet she appeared to link the two men together — even physically — as on these occasions when, taking an arm of each, she walked affection-

ately between them along the river-bank promenade, to the great marveling and admiration of the Bar. It was said, however, that Mr. Jack Hamlin, a gambler, at that moment professionally visiting Wayne's Bar, and a great connoisseur of feminine charms and weaknesses, had glanced at them under his handsome lashes, and asked a single question, evidently so amusing to the younger members of the Bar that Madison Wayne knit his brow and Arthur Wayne blushed. Mr. Hamlin took no heed of the elder brother's frown, but paid some slight attention to the color of the younger brother, and even more to a slightly coquettish glance from the pretty Mrs. McGee. Whether or not — as has been ingeniously alleged by some moralists — the light and trifling of either sex are prone to recognize each other by some mysterious instinct, is not a necessary consideration of this chronicle; enough that the fact is recorded.

And yet Madison Wayne should have been satisfied with his work! His sacrifice was accepted; his happy issue from a dangerous situation, and his happy triumph over a more dangerous temptation, was complete and perfect, and even achieved according to his own gloomy theories of redemption and regeneration. Yet he was not happy. The human heart is at times strangely unappeasable. And as he sat that evening in the gathering shadows, the Book which should have yielded him balm and comfort lay unopened in his lap.

A step upon the gravel outside had become too familiar to startle him. It was Mr. McGee lounging into the cabin like a gaunt shadow. It must be admitted that the friendship of these strangely contrasted men, however sincere and sympathetic, was not cheerful. A belief in the thorough wickedness of humanity, kept under only through fear of extreme penalty and punishment, material and spiritual, was not conducive to light and amusing conversation. Their talk was mainly a gloomy chronicle of life at the Bar,

which was in itself half an indictment. To-night, Mr. McGee spoke of the advent of Mr. Jack Hamlin, and together they deplored the diversion of the hard-earned gains and valuable time of the Bar through the efforts of that ingenious gentleman. "Not," added McGee cautiously, "but what he can shoot straight enough, and I've heard tell that he don't *lie*. That mout and it mout n't be good for your brother who goes around with him considerable, there 's different ways of lookin' at that; you understand what I mean? You follow me?" For all that, the conversation seemed to languish this evening, partly through some abstraction on the part of Wayne and partly some hesitation in McGee, who appeared to have a greater fear than usual of not expressing himself plainly. It was quite dark in the cabin when at last, detaching himself from his usual lounging-place, the door-post, he walked to the window and leaned, more shadowy than ever, over Wayne's chair. "I want to tell you suthin'," he said slowly, "that I don't want you to misunderstand — you follow me? and that ain't noways carpin' or criticisin' nor reflectin' on *you* — you understand what I mean? Ever sens you and me had that talk here about you and Safie, and ever sens I got the hang of your ways and your style o' thinkin', I've been as sure of you and her as if I'd been myself trottin' round with you and a revolver. And I'm as sure of you now — you sabe what I mean? you understand? You 've done me and her a heap o' good; she 's almost another woman sens you took hold of her, and ef you ever want me to stand up and 'testify,' as you call it, in church, Sandy McGee is ready. What I 'm tryin' to say to ye is this. Though I understand you and your work and your ways — there 's other folks ez mout n't — you follow? You understand what I mean? And it 's just that I 'm coming to. Now las' night, when you and Safie was meanderin' along the lower path by the water, and I kem across you" —

"But," interrupted Madison quickly, "you 're mistaken. I was n't" —

"Hol' on," said McGee quietly; "I know you got out o' the way without you seein' me or me you, because you did n't know it was me, don't you see? don't you follow? and that 's just it! It mout have bin some one from the Bar as seed you instead o' *me*. See? That 's why you lit out before I could recognize you, and that 's why poor Safie was so mighty flustered at first and was for runnin' away until she kem to herself agin. When, of course, she laughed, and agreed you must have mistook me."

"But," gasped Madison quickly, "*I was n't there at all last night.*"

"What?"

The two men had risen simultaneously and were facing each other. McGee, with a good-natured, half-critical expression, laid his hand on Wayne's shoulder and slightly turned him towards the window, that he might see his face. It seemed to him white and dazed.

"You — was n't — there — last night?" he repeated, with a slow tolerance.

Scarcely a moment elapsed, but the agony of an hour may have thrilled through Wayne's consciousness before he spoke. Then all the blood of his body rushed to his face with his first lie as he stammered, "No! Yes! Of course. I have made a mistake — it *was* I."

"I see — you thought I was riled?" said McGee quietly.

"No; I was thinking it was *night before last!* Of course it was last night. I must be getting silly." He essayed a laugh — rare at any time with him — and so forced now that it affected McGee more than his embarrassment. He looked at Wayne thoughtfully, and then said slowly: "I reckon I did come upon you a little too sudden last night, but, you see, I was thinkin' of suthin' else

and disremembered you might be there. But I was n't mad — no ! no ! and I only spoke about it now that you might be more keerful before folks. You follow me ? You understand what I mean ? "

He turned and walked to the door, when he halted. " You follow me, don't you ? It ain't no cussedness o' mine, or want o' trustin', don't you see ? Mebbe I oughtened have spoken. I oughter remembered that times this sort o' thing must be rather rough on you and her. You follow me ? You understand what I mean ? Good-night."

He walked slowly down the path towards the river. Had Madison Wayne been watching him, he would have noticed that his head was bent and his step less free. But Madison Wayne was at that moment sitting rigidly in his chair, nursing, with all the gloomy concentration of a monastic nature, a single terrible suspicion.

CHAPTER IV

Howbeit the sun shone cheerfully over the Bar the next morning and the next; the breath of life and activity was in the air; the settlement never had been more prosperous, and the yield from the opened placers on the drained river-bed that week was enormous. The Brothers Wayne were said to be "rolling in gold." It was thought to be consistent with Madison Wayne's nature that there was no trace of good fortune in his face or manner — rather that he had become more nervous, restless, and gloomy. This was attributed to the joylessness of avarice as contrasted with the spendthrift gayety of the more liberal Arthur, and he was feared and *respected* as a miser. His long, solitary walks around the promontory, his incessant watchfulness, his reticence when questioned, were all recognized as the indications of a man whose soul was absorbed in money-getting. The reverence they failed to yield to his religious isolation they were willing to freely accord to his financial abstraction. But Mr. McGee was not so deceived. Overtaking him one day under the fringe of willows, he characteristically chided him with absenting himself from Mrs. McGee and her house since their last interview.

"I reckon you did not harbor malice in your Christianity," he said; "but it looks mighty like ez if ye was throwing off on Safie and me on account of what I said."

In vain Madison gloomily and almost sternly protested.

McGee looked him all over with his clear measuring eye, and for some minutes was singularly silent. At last he said slowly: "I 've been thinkin' suthin' o' goin' down

to 'Frisco, and I 'd be a heap easier in my mind ef you 'd promise to look arter Safie now and then."

"You surely are not going to leave her here *alone?*" said Wayne roughly.

"Why not?"

For an instant Wayne hesitated. Then he burst out. "For a hundred reasons! If she ever wanted your protection, she surely does now. Do you suppose the Bar is any less heathen or more regenerated than it was when you thought it necessary to guard her with your revolver? Man! It is a hundred times worse than then! The new claims have filled it with spying adventurers — with wolves like Hamlin and his friends — idolaters who would set up Baal and Ashteroth here — and fill your tents with the curses of Sodom!"

Perhaps it was owing to the Scriptural phrasing, perhaps it was from some unusual authority of the man's manner, but a look of approving relief and admiration came into McGee's clear eyes.

"And *you 're* just the man to tackle 'em," he said, clapping his hand on Wayne's shoulder. "That 's your gait — keep it up! But," he added in a lower voice, "me and my revolver are played out." There was a strangeness in the tone that arrested Wayne's attention. "Yes," continued McGee, stroking his beard slowly, "men like me has their day, and revolvers has theirs; the world turns round and the Bar fills up and this yer river changes its course — and it 's all in the day's work. You understand what I mean — you follow me? And if anything should happen to me — not that it 's like to; but it 's in the way o' men — I want you to look arter Safie. It ain't every woman ez has two men, ez like and unlike, to guard her. You follow me — you understand what I mean, don't you?" With these words he parted somewhat abruptly from Wayne, turning into the steep path to the promontory

crest and leaving his companion lost in gloomy abstraction. The next day Alexander McGee had departed on a business trip to San Francisco.

In his present state of mind, with his new responsibility and the carrying out of a plan which he had vaguely conceived might remove the terrible idea that had taken possession of him, Madison Wayne was even relieved when his brother also announced his intention of going to Angel's for a few days.

For since his memorable interview with McGee, he had been convinced that Safie had been clandestinely visited by some one. Whether it was the thoughtless and momentary indiscretion of a willful woman, or the sequel to some deliberately planned intrigue, did not concern him so much as the falsity of his own position, and the conniving lie by which he had saved her and her lover. That at this crucial moment he had failed to "testify" to guilt and wickedness; that he firmly believed — such is the inordinate vanity of the religious zealot — that he had denied Him in his effort to shield *her;* and that he had broken faith with the husband who had entrusted to him the custody of his wife's honor seemed to him more terrible than her faithlessness. In his first horror he had dreaded to see her, lest her very confession — he knew her reckless frankness towards himself — should reveal to him the extent of his complicity. But since then, and during her husband's absence, he had convinced himself that it was his duty to wrestle and strive with her weak spirit, to implore her to reveal her new intrigue to her husband, and then he would help her to sue for his forgiveness. It was a part of the inconsistency of his religious convictions; in his human passion he was perfectly unselfish, and had already forgiven her the offense against himself. He would see her at once!

But it happened to be a quiet, intense night, with the

tremulous opulence of a full moon that threw quivering shafts of light like summer lightning over the blue river, and laid a wonderful carpet of intricate lace along the path that wound through the willows to the crest. There was the dry, stimulating dust and spice of heated pines from below; the languorous odors of syringa; the faint, feminine smell of southernwood, and the infinite mystery of silence. This silence was at times softly broken with the tender inarticulate whisper of falling leaves, broken sighs from the tree-tops, and the languid stretching of wakened and unclasping boughs. Madison Wayne had not, alas! taken into account this subtle conspiracy of Night and Nature, and as he climbed higher, his steps began to falter with new and strange sensations. The rigidity of purpose which had guided the hard religious convictions that always sustained him began to relax. A tender sympathy stole over him; a loving mercy to himself as well as others stole into his heart. He thought of *her* as she had nestled at his side, hand in hand, upon the moonlit veranda of her father's house, before his hard convictions had chilled and affrighted her. He thought of her fresh simplicity, and what had seemed to him her wonderful girlish beauty, and lo! in a quick turn of the path he stood breathless and tremulous before the house. The moonbeams lay tenderly upon the peaceful eaves; the long blossoms of the madeira-vine seemed sleeping also. The pink flush of the Cherokee rose in the unreal light had become chastely white.

But he was evidently too late for an interview. The windows were blank in the white light; only one — her bedroom — showed a light behind the lowered muslin blind. Her draped shadow once or twice passed across it. He was turning away with soft steps and even bated breath when suddenly he stopped. The exaggerated but unmistakable shadow of a man stood beside hers on the blind.

With a fierce leap as of a maniac, he was at the door, pounding, rattling, and uttering hoarse and furious outcries. Even through his fury he heard quickened footsteps — her light, reckless, half-hysterical laugh — a bound upon the staircase — the hurried unbolting and opening of distant doors, as the lighter one with which he was struggling at last yielded to his blind rage, and threw him crashing into the sitting-room. The back door was wide open. He could hear the rustling and crackling of twigs and branches in different directions down the hillside, where the fugitives had separated as they escaped. And yet he stood there for an instant, dazed and wondering, "What next?"

His eyes fell upon McGee's rifle standing upright in the corner. It was a clean, beautiful, precise weapon, even to the unprofessional eye, its long, laminated hexagonal barrel taking a tenderer blue in the moonlight. He snatched it up. It was capped and loaded. Without a pause he dashed down the hill.

Only one thought was in his mind now — the crudest, simplest duty. He was there in McGee's place; he should do what McGee would do. God had abandoned him, but McGee's rifle remained.

In a few minutes' downward plunging he had reached the river-bank. The tranquil silver surface quivered and glittered before him. He saw what he knew he would see, the black target of a man's head above it, making for the Bar. He took deliberate aim and fired. There was no echo to that sharp detonation; a distant dog barked, there was a slight whisper in the trees beside him, that was all! But the head of the man was no longer visible, and the liquid silver filmed over again, without a speck or stain.

He shouldered the rifle, and with the automatic action of men in great crises returned slowly and deliberately to the house and carefully replaced the rifle in its old position. He had no concern for the miserable woman who

had fled; had she appeared before him at the moment, he would not have noticed her. Yet a strange instinct — it seemed to him the vaguest curiosity — made him ascend the stairs and enter her chamber. The candle was still burning on the table with that awful unconsciousness and simplicity of detail which make the scene of real tragedy so terrible. Beside it lay a belt and leather pouch. Madison Wayne suddenly dashed forward and seized it, with a wild, inarticulate cry; staggered, fell over the chair, rose to his feet, blindly groped his way down the staircase, burst into the road, and, hugging the pouch to his bosom, fled like a madman down the hill.

. . . . . .

The body of Arthur Wayne was picked up two days later a dozen miles down the river. Nothing could be more evident and prosaic than the manner in which he had met his fate. His body was only partly clothed, and the money pouch and belt, which had been securely locked next his skin, after the fashion of all miners, was gone. He was known to have left the Bar with a considerable sum of money; he was undoubtedly dogged, robbed, and murdered during his journey on the river-bank by the desperadoes who were beginning to infest the vicinity. The grief and agony of his only brother, sole survivor of that fraternal and religious partnership so well known to the camp, although shown only by a grim and speechless melancholy, — broken by unintelligible outbursts of religious raving, — was so real, that it affected even the callous camp. But scarcely had it regained its feverish distraction, before it was thrilled by another sensation. Alexander McGee had fallen from the deck of a Sacramento steamboat in the Straits of Carquinez, and his body had been swept out to sea. The news had apparently reached the ears of his devoted wife first, for when the camp — at this lapse of the old prohibition — climbed to her bower

with their rude consolations, the house was found locked and deserted. The fateful influence of the promontory had again prevailed, the grim record of its seclusion was once more unbroken.

For with it, too, drooped and faded the fortunes of the Bar. Madison Wayne sold out his claim, endowed the church at the Cross Roads with the proceeds, and the pulpit with his grim, hopeless, denunciatory presence. The first rains brought a freshet to the Bar. The river leaped the light barriers that had taken the place of Wayne's peaceful engines, and regained the old channel. The curse that the Rev. Madison Wayne had launched on this riverside Sodom seemed to have been fulfilled. But even this brought no satisfaction to the gloomy prophet, for it was presently known that he had abandoned his terror-stricken flock to take the circuit as revivalist preacher and camp-meeting exhorter, in the rudest and most lawless of gatherings. Desperate ruffians writhed at his feet in impotent terror or more impotent rage; murderers and thieves listened to him with blanched faces and set teeth, restrained only by a more awful fear. Over and over again he took his life with his Bible into his own hands when he rose above the excited multitude; he was shot at, he was rail-ridden, he was deported, but never silenced. And so, sweeping over the country, carrying fear and frenzy with him, scouting life and mercy, and crushing alike the guilty and innocent, he came one Sabbath to a rocky crest of the Sierras — the last tattered and frayed and soiled fringe of civilization on the opened tract of a great highway. And here he was to "testify," as was his wont.

But not as he expected. For as he stood up on a boulder above the thirty or forty men sitting or lying upon other rocks and boulders around him, on the craggy mountain shelf where they had gathered, a man also rose, elbowed past them, and with a hurried impulse tried to descend the

declivity. But a cry was suddenly heard from others, quick and clamoring, which called the whole assembly to its feet, and it was seen that the fugitive had in some blundering way fallen from the precipice.

He was brought up cruelly maimed and mangled, his ribs crushed, and one lung perforated, but still breathing and conscious. He had asked to see the preacher. Death impending, and even then struggling with his breath, made this request imperative. Madison Wayne stopped the service, and stalked grimly and inflexibly to where the dying man lay. But there he started.

"McGee!" he said breathlessly.

"Send these men away," said McGee faintly. "I've got suthin' to tell you."

The men drew back without a word. "You thought I was dead," said McGee, with eyes still undimmed and marvelously clear. "I orter bin, but it don't need no doctor to say it ain't far off now. I left the Bar to get killed; I tried to in a row, but the fellows were skeert to close with me, thinkin' I'd shoot. My reputation was agin me, there! You follow me? You understand what I mean?"

Kneeling beside him now and grasping both his hands, the changed and horror-stricken Wayne gasped, "But" —

"Hold on! I jumped off the Sacramento boat — I was goin' down the third time — they thought on the boat I was gone — they think so now! But a passin' fisherman dived for me. I grappled him — he was clear grit and would have gone down with me, but I could n't let him die too — havin' so to speak no cause. You follow me — you understand me? I let him save me. But it was all the same, for when I got to 'Frisco I read as how I was drowned. And then I reckoned it was all right, and I wandered *here*, where I was n't known — until I saw you."

"But why should you want to die?" said Wayne, almost fiercely. "What right have you to die while others

— double-dyed and blood-stained, are condemned to live, 'testify,' and suffer?"

The dying man feebly waved a deprecation with his maimed hand, and even smiled faintly. "I knew you 'd say that. I knew what you 'd think about it, but it 's all the same now. I did it for you and Safie! I knew I was in the way; I knew you was the man she orter had; I knew you was the man who had dragged her outer the mire and clay where I was leavin' her, as you did when she fell in the water. I knew that every day I lived I was makin' *you* suffer and breakin' *her* heart — for all she tried to be gentle and gay."

"Great God in heaven! Will you stop!" said Wayne, springing to his feet in agony. A frightened look — the first that any one had ever seen in the clear eyes of the Bell-ringer of Angel's — passed over them, and he murmured tremulously: "All right — I 'm stoppin'!"

So, too, was his heart, for the wonderful eyes were now slowly glazing. Yet he rallied once more — coming up again the third time as it seemed to Wayne — and his lips moved slowly. The preacher threw himself despairingly on the ground beside him.

"Speak, brother! For God's sake, speak!"

It was his last whisper — so faint it might have been the first of his freed soul. But he only said: —

"You 're — followin' — me? You — understand — what — I — mean?"

SALLY DOWS

PROLOGUE

THE LAST GUN AT SNAKE RIVER

WHAT had been in the cool gray of that summer morning a dewy country lane, marked only by a few wagon tracks that never encroached upon its grassy border, and indented only by the faint footprints of a crossing fox or coon, was now, before high noon, already crushed, beaten down, and trampled out of all semblance of its former graciousness. The heavy springless jolt of gun-carriage and caisson had cut deeply through the middle track; the hoofs of crowding cavalry had struck down and shredded the wayside vines and bushes to bury them under a cloud of following dust, and the short, plunging double-quick of infantry had trodden out this hideous ruin into one dusty level chaos. Along that rudely widened highway useless muskets, torn accoutrements, knapsacks, caps, and articles of clothing were scattered, with here and there the larger wrecks of broken-down wagons, roughly thrown aside into the ditch to make way for the living current. For two hours the greater part of an army corps had passed and repassed that way, but, coming or going, always with faces turned eagerly towards an open slope on the right which ran parallel to the lane. And yet nothing was to be seen there. For two hours a gray and bluish cloud, rent and shaken with explosion after explosion, but always closing and thickening after each discharge, was all that had met

their eyes. Nevertheless, into this ominous cloud solid moving masses of men in gray or blue had that morning melted away, or emerged from it only as scattered fragments that crept, crawled, ran, or clung together in groups, to be followed, and overtaken in the rolling vapor.

But for the last half hour the desolated track had stretched empty and deserted. While there was no cessation of the rattling, crackling, and detonations on the fateful slope beyond, it had still been silent. Once or twice it had been crossed by timid, hurrying wings, and frightened and hesitating little feet, or later by skulkers and stragglers from the main column who were tempted to enter it from the hedges and bushes where they had been creeping and hiding. Suddenly a prolonged yell from the hidden slope beyond — the nearest sound that had yet been heard from that ominous distance — sent them to cover again. It was followed by the furious galloping of horses in the lane, and a handsome, red-capped officer, accompanied by an orderly, dashed down the track, wheeled, leaped the hedge, rode out on the slope, and halted. In another instant a cloud of dust came whirling down the lane after him. Out of it strained the heavy shoulders and tightened chain-traces of six frantic horses dragging the swaying gun that in this tempest of motion alone seemed passive and helpless with an awful foreknowledge of its power. As in obedience to a signal from the officer they crashed through the hedge after him, a sudden jolt threw an artillery-man from the limber before the wheel. A driver glanced back on the tense chain and hesitated. "Go on!" yelled the prostrate man, and the wheel went over him. Another and another gun followed out of the dust cloud, until the whole battery had deployed on the slope. Before the drifting dust had fairly settled, the falling back of the panting horses with their drivers gave a momentary glimpse of the nearest gun already in position and of the four erect figures beside it. The

yell that seemed to have evoked this sudden apparition again sounded nearer; a blinding flash broke from the gun, which was instantly hidden by the closing group around it, and a deafening crash with the high ringing of metal ran down the lane. A column of white, woolly smoke arose as another flash broke beside it. This was quickly followed by another and another, with a response from the gun first fired, until the whole slope shook and thundered. And the smoke, no longer white and woolly, but darkening and thickening as with unburnt grains of gunpowder, mingled into the one ominous vapor, and driving along the lane hid even the slope from view.

The yelling had ceased, but the grinding and rattling heard through the detonation of cannon came nearer still, and suddenly there was a shower of leaves and twigs from the lower branches of a chestnut-tree near the broken hedge. As the smoke thinned again a rising and falling medley of flapping hats, tossing horses' heads, and shining steel appeared for an instant, advancing tumultuously up the slope. But the apparition was as instantly cloven by flame from the two nearest guns, and went down in a gush of smoke and roar of sound. So level was the delivery and so close the impact that a space seemed suddenly cleared between, in which the whirling of the shattered remnants of the charging cavalry was distinctly seen, and the shouts and oaths of the inextricably struggling mass became plain and articulate. Then a gunner serving the nearest piece suddenly dropped his swab and seized a carbine, for out of the whirling confusion before them a single rider was seen galloping furiously towards the gun.

The red-capped young officer rode forward and knocked up the gunner's weapon with his sword. For in that rapid glance he had seen that the rider's reins were hanging loosely on the neck of his horse, who was still dashing forwards with the frantic impetus of the charge, and that the youthful

figure of the rider, — wearing the stripes of a lieutenant, — although still erect, exercised no control over the animal. The face was boyish, blond, and ghastly ; the eyes were set and glassy. It seemed as if Death itself were charging the gun.

Within a few feet of it, the horse swerved before a brandished rammer, and striking the cheeks of the gun-carriage pitched his inanimate rider across the gun. The hot blood of the dead man smoked on the hotter brass with the reek of the shambles, and bespattered the hand of the gunner who still mechanically served the vent. As they lifted the dead body down, the order came to "cease firing." For the yells from below had ceased too ; the rattling and grinding were receding with the smoke farther to the left. The ominous central cloud parted for a brief moment and showed the unexpected sun glittering down the slope upon a near and peaceful river.

The young artillery officer had dismounted and was now gently examining the dead man. His breast had been crushed by a fragment of shell ; he must have died instantly. The same missile had cut the chain of a locket which slipped from his opened coat. The officer picked it up with a strange feeling — perhaps because he was conscious himself of wearing a similar one, perhaps because it might give him some clue to the man's identity. It contained only the photograph of a pretty girl, a tendril of fair hair, and the word "Sally." In the breast-pocket was a sealed letter with the inscription, "For Miss Sally Dows. To be delivered if I fall by the mudsill's hand." A faint smile came over the officer's face ; he was about to hand the articles to a sergeant, but changed his mind and put them in his pocket.

Meantime the lane and woods beyond, and even the slope itself, were crowding with supports and waiting troops. His own battery was still unlimbered, waiting orders. There was a slight commotion in the lane.

"Very well done, captain. Smartly taken and gallantly held."

It was the voice of a general officer passing with his staff. There was a note of pleasant relief in its tone, and the middle-aged, care-drawn face of its owner was relaxed in a paternal smile. The young captain flushed with pleasure.

"And you seem to have had close work too," added the general, pointing to the dead man.

The young officer hurriedly explained. The general nodded, saluted, and passed on. But a youthful aide airily lingered.

"The old man 's feeling good, Courtland," he said. "We 've rolled 'em up all along the line. It 's all over now. In point of fact, I reckon you 've fired the last round in this particular fratricidal engagement."

The last round! Courtland remained silent, looking abstractedly at the man it had crushed and broken at his feet.

"And I should n't wonder if you got your gold-leaf for to-day's work. But who 's your sunny Southern friend here?" he added, following his companion's eyes.

Courtland repeated his story a little more seriously, which, however, failed to subdue the young aide's levity. "So he concluded to stop over," he interrupted cheerfully. "But," looking at the letter and photograph, "I say — look here! 'Sally Dows'? Why, there was another man picked up yesterday with a letter to the same girl! Doc Murphy has it. And by Jove! the same picture too! — eh? I say, Sally must have gathered in the boys, and raked down the whole pile! Look here, Courty! you might get Doc Murphy's letter and hunt her up when this cruel war is over. Say you 're 'fulfilling a sacred trust'! See? Good idea, old man! Ta-ta!" and he trotted quickly after his superior.

Courtland remained with the letter and photograph in his hand, gazing abstractedly after him. The smoke had

rolled quite away from the fields on the left, but still hung heavily down the south on the heels of the flying cavalry. A long bugle call swelled up musically from below. The freed sun caught the white flags of two field hospitals in the woods and glanced tranquilly on the broad, cypress-fringed, lazy-flowing, and cruel but beautiful Southern river, which had all unseen crept so smilingly that morning through the very heart of the battle.

CHAPTER I

The two o'clock express from Redlands to Forestville, Georgia, had been proceeding with the languid placidity of the river whose banks it skirted for more than two hours. But, unlike the river, it had stopped frequently; sometimes at recognized stations and villages, sometimes at the apparition of straw-hatted and linen-coated natives in the solitude of pine woods, where, after a decent interval of cheery conversation with the conductor and engineer, it either took the stranger on board, or relieved him of his parcel, letter, basket, or even the verbal message with which he was charged. Much of the way lay through pine-barren and swampy woods which had never been cleared or cultivated; much through decayed settlements and ruined villages that had remained unchanged since the War of the Rebellion, now three years past. There were vestiges of the severity of a former military occupation; the blackened timbers of railway bridges still unrepaired; and along the line of a certain memorable march, sections of iron rails taken from the torn-up track, roasted in bonfires and bent while red-hot around the trunks of trees, were still to be seen. These mementos of defeat seemed to excite neither revenge nor the energy to remove them; the dull apathy which had succeeded the days of hysterical passion and convulsion still lingered; even the slow improvement that could be detected was marked by the languor of convalescence. The helplessness of a race, hitherto dependent upon certain barbaric conditions or political place and power, unskilled in invention, and suddenly confronted with the necessity of

personal labor, was visible everywhere. Eyes that but three short years before had turned vindictively to the North, now gazed wistfully to that quarter for help and direction. They scanned eagerly the faces of their energetic and prosperous neighbors — and quondam foes — upon the verandas of Southern hotels and the decks of Southern steamboats, and were even now watching from a group in the woods the windows of the halted train, where the faces appeared of two men of manifestly different types, but still alien to the country in dress, features, and accent.

Two negroes were slowly loading the engine tender from a woodpile. The rich brown smoke of the turpentine knots was filling the train with its stinging fragrance. The elder of the two Northern passengers, with sharp New England angles in his face, impatiently glanced at his watch.

"Of all created shiftlessness, this beats everything! Why could n't we have taken in enough wood to last the ten miles farther to the terminus when we last stopped? And why in thunder, with all this firing up, can't we go faster?"

The younger passenger, whose quiet, well-bred face seemed to indicate more discipline of character, smiled.

"If you really wish to know — and as we've only ten miles farther to go — I 'll show you *why*. Come with me."

He led the way through the car to the platform and leaped down. Then he pointed significantly to the rails below them. His companion started. The metal was scaling off in thin strips from the rails, and in some places its thickness had been reduced a quarter of an inch, while in others the projecting edges were torn off, or hanging in iron shreds, so that the wheels actually ran on the narrow central strip. It seemed marvelous that the train could keep the track.

"*Now* you know why we don't go more than five miles

an hour, and — are thankful that we don't," said the young traveler quietly.

"But this is disgraceful! — criminal!" ejaculated the other nervously.

"Not at their rate of speed," returned the younger man. "The crime would be in going faster. And now you can understand why a good deal of the other progress in this State is obliged to go as slowly over their equally decaying and rotten foundations. You can't rush things here as we do in the North."

The other passenger shrugged his shoulders as they remounted the platform, and the train moved on. It was not the first time that the two fellow travelers had differed, although their mission was a common one. The elder, Mr. Cyrus Drummond, was the vice-president of a large Northern land and mill company, which had bought extensive tracts of land in Georgia, and the younger, Colonel Courtland, was the consulting surveyor and engineer for the company. Drummond's opinions were a good deal affected by sectional prejudice, and a self-satisfied and righteous ignorance of the actual conditions and limitations of the people with whom he was to deal; while the younger man, who had served through the war with distinction, retained a soldier's respect and esteem for his late antagonists, with a conscientious and thoughtful observation of their character. Although he had resigned from the army, the fact that he had previously graduated at West Point with high honors had given him preferment in this technical appointment, and his knowledge of the country and its people made him a valuable counselor. And it was a fact that the country people had preferred this soldier with whom they had once personally grappled to the capitalist they had never known during the struggle.

The train rolled slowly through the woods, so slowly that the fragrant pine smoke from the engine still hung

round the windows of the cars. Gradually the "clearings" became larger; they saw the distant white wooden colonnades of some planter's house, looking still opulent and pretentious, although the fence of its inclosure had broken gaps, and the gate sagged on its single hinge.

Mr. Drummond sniffed at this damning record of neglect and indifference. "Even if they were ruined, they might still have spent a few cents for nails and slats to enable them to look decent before folks, and not parade their poverty before their neighbors," he said.

"But that 's just where you misunderstand them, Drummond," said Courtland, smiling. "They have no reason to keep up an attitude towards their neighbors, who still know them as 'Squire' so-and-so, 'Colonel' this and that, and the 'Judge,' — owners of their vast but crippled estates. They are not ashamed of being poor, which is an accident."

"But they are of working, which is *deliberation*," interrupted Drummond. "They are ashamed to mend their fences themselves, now that they have no slaves to do it for them."

"I doubt very much if some of them know how to drive a nail, for the matter of that," said Courtland, still good humoredly, "but that 's the fault of a system older than themselves, which the founders of the Republic retained. We cannot give them experience in their new condition in one day, and in fact, Drummond, I am very much afraid that for our purposes — and I honestly believe for *their* good — we must help to keep them for the present as they are."

"Perhaps," said Drummond sarcastically, "you would like to reinstate slavery?"

"No. But I should like to reinstate the *master*. And not for *his* sake alone, but for freedom's sake and *ours*. To be plain: since I have taken up this matter for the

company, I have satisfied myself from personal observation that the negro — even more than his master — cannot handle his new condition. He is accustomed to his old traditional task-master, and I doubt if he will work fairly for any other — particularly for those who don't understand him. Don't mistake me: I don't propose to go back to the whip; to that brutal institution, the irresponsible overseer; to the buying and selling, and separation of the family, nor any of the old wrongs; but I propose to make the old master *our overseer*, and responsible to *us*. He is not a fool, and has already learned that it is more profitable to pay wages to his old slaves and have the power of dismissal, like any other employer, than be obliged, under the old system of enforced labor and life servitude, to undergo the cost of maintaining incompetence and idleness. The old sentiment of slave-owning has disappeared before natural common sense and selfishness. I am satisfied that by some such process as this utilizing of the old master and the new freedom we will be better able to cultivate our lands than by buying up their estates, and setting the old owners adrift, with a little money in their pockets, as an idle, discontented class to revive old political dogmas, and foment new issues, or perhaps set up a dangerous opposition to us."

"You don't mean to say that those infernal niggers would give the preference to their old oppressors?"

"Dollar for dollar in wages — yes! And why should n't they? Their old masters understand them better — and treat them generally better. They know our interest in them is only an abstract sentiment, not a real liking. We show it at every turn. But we are nearing Redlands, and Major Reed will, I have no doubt, corroborate my impressions. He insists upon our staying at his house, although the poor old fellow, I imagine, can ill afford to entertain company. But he will be offended if we refuse."

"He is a friend of yours, then?" asked Drummond.

"I fought against his division at Stony Creek," said Courtland grimly. "He never tires of talking of it to me — so I suppose I am."

A few moments later the train glided beside the Redlands platform. As the two travelers descended a hand was laid on Courtland's shoulder, and a stout figure in the blackest and shiniest of alpaca jackets, and the whitest and broadest of Panama hats, welcomed him. "Glad to see yo', cun'nel. I reckoned I 'd waltz over and bring along the boy," pointing to a grizzled negro servant of sixty who was bowing before them, "to tote yo'r things over instead of using a hack. I have n't run much on horseflesh since the wah — ha! ha! What *I* did n't use up for remounts I reckon yo'r commissary gobbled up with the other live stock, eh?" He laughed heartily, as if the recollections were purely humorous, and again clapped Courtland on the back.

"Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Drummond, Major Reed," said Courtland, smiling.

"Yo' were in the wah, sir?"

"No — I" — returned Drummond, hesitating, he knew not why, and angry at his own embarrassment.

"Mr. Drummond, the vice-president of the company," interposed Courtland cheerfully, "was engaged in furnishing to us the sinews of war."

Major Reed bowed a little more formally. "Most of us heah, sir, were in the wah some time or other, and if you gentlemen will honah me by joining in a social glass at the hotel across the way, I 'll introduce you to Captain Prendergast, who left a leg at Fair Oaks." Drummond would have declined, but a significant pressure on his arm from Courtland changed his determination. He followed them to the hotel and into the presence of the one-legged warrior (who turned out to be the landlord and barkeeper), to whom

Courtland was hilariously introduced by Major Reed as "the man, sir, who had pounded my division for three hours at Stony Creek!"

Major Reed's house was but a few minutes' walk down the dusty lane, and was presently heralded by the baying of three or four foxhounds and foreshadowed by a dilapidated condition of picket-fence and stuccoed gate front. Beyond it stretched the wooden Doric columns of the usual Southern mansion, dimly seen through the broad leaves of the horse-chestnut-trees that shaded it. There were the usual listless black shadows haunting the veranda and outer offices — former slaves and still attached house-servants, arrested like lizards in breathless attitudes at the approach of strange footsteps, and still holding the brush, broom, duster, or home implement they had been lazily using, in their fixed hands. From the doorway of the detached kitchen, connected by a gallery to the wing of the mansion, "Aunt Martha," the cook, gazed also, with a saucepan clasped to her bosom, and her revolving hand with the scrubbing cloth in it apparently stopped on a dead centre.

Drummond, whose gorge had risen at these evidences of hopeless incapacity and utter shiftlessness, was not relieved by the presence of Mrs. Reed — a soured, disappointed woman of forty, who still carried in her small dark eyes and thin handsome lips something of the bitterness and antagonism of the typical "Southern rights" woman; nor of her two daughters, Octavia and Augusta, whose languid atrabiliousness seemed a part of the mourning they still wore. The optimistic gallantry and good fellowship of the major appeared the more remarkable by contrast with his cypress-shadowed family and their venomous possibilities. Perhaps there might have been a light vein of Southern insincerity in his good humor. "Paw," said Miss Octavia, with gloomy confidence to Courtland, but with a pretty curl of the hereditary lip, "is about the only 'reconstructed' one

of the entire family. We don't make 'em much about yer. But I 'd advise yo' friend, Mr. Drummond, if he 's coming here carpet-bagging, not to trust too much to paw's 'reconstruction.' It won't wash." But when Courtland hastened to assure her that Drummond was not a "carpet-bagger," was not only free from any of the political intrigue implied under that baleful title, but was a wealthy Northern capitalist simply seeking investment, the young lady was scarcely more hopeful. "I suppose he reckons to pay paw for those niggers yo' stole?" she suggested, with gloomy sarcasm.

"No," said Courtland, smiling; "but what if he reckoned to pay those niggers for working for your father and him?"

"If paw is going into trading business with him; if Major Reed — a So'th'n gentleman — is going to keep shop, he ain't such a fool as to believe niggers will work when they ain't obliged to. *That 's* been tried over at Mirandy Dows's, not five miles from here, and the niggers are half the time hangin' round here takin' holiday. She put up new quarters for 'em, and tried to make 'em eat together at a long table like those low-down folks up North, and did away with their cabins and their melon patches, and allowed it would get 'em out of lying round too much, and wanted 'em to work over-time and get mo' pay. And the result was that she and her niece, and a lot of poor whites, Irish and Scotch, that she had to pick up 'long the river,' do all the work. And her niece Sally was mo' than half Union woman during the wah, and up to all No'th'n tricks and dodges, and swearin' by them; and yet, for all that — the thing won't work."

"But is n't that partly the reason? Is n't her failure a great deal due to this lack of sympathy from her neighbors? Discontent is easily sown, and the negro is still weighted down by superstition; the Fifteenth Amendment did not quite knock off *all* his chains."

"Yes, but that is nothing to *her*. For if there ever was a person in this world who reckoned she was just born to manage everything and everybody, it is Sally Dows!"

"Sally Dows!" repeated Courtland, with a slight start.

"Yes, Sally Dows, of Pineville."

"You say she was half Union, but did she have any relations or — or — friends — in the war — on your side? Any — who — were killed in battle?"

"They were all killed, I reckon," returned Miss Reed darkly. "There was her cousin, Jule Jeffcourt, shot in the cemetery with her beau, who, they say, was Sally's too; there were Chet Brooks and Joyce Masterton, who were both gone on her and both killed too; and there was old Captain Dows himself, who never lifted his head again after Richmond was taken, and drank himself to death. It was n't considered healthy to be Miss Sally's relations in those times, or to be even wantin' to be one."

Colonel Courtland did not reply. The face of the dead young officer coming towards him out of the blue smoke rose as vividly as on that memorable day. The picture and letter he had taken from the dead man's breast, which he had retained ever since; the romantic and fruitless quest he had made for the fair original in after days; and the strange and fateful interest in her which had grown up in his heart since then, he now knew had only been lulled to sleep in the busy preoccupation of the last six months, for it all came back to him with redoubled force. His present mission and its practical object, his honest zeal in its pursuit, and the cautious skill and experience he had brought to it, all seemed to be suddenly displaced by this romantic and unreal fantasy. Oddly enough it appeared now to be the only reality in his life, the rest was an incoherent, purposeless dream.

"Is — is — Miss Sally married?" he asked, collecting himself with an effort.

"Married? Yes, to that farm of her aunt's! I reckon that's the only thing she cares for."

Courtland looked up, recovering his usual cheerful calm. "Well, I think that after luncheon I'll pay my respects to her family. From what you have just told me the farm is certainly an experiment worth seeing. I suppose your father will have no objection to give me a letter to Miss Dows?"

CHAPTER II

Nevertheless, as Colonel Courtland rode deliberately towards Dows' Folly, as the new experiment was locally called, although he had not abated his romantic enthusiasm in the least, he was not sorry that he was able to visit it under a practical pretext. It was rather late now to seek out Miss Sally Dows with the avowed intent of bringing her a letter from an admirer who had been dead three years, and whose memory she had probably buried. Neither was it tactful to recall a sentiment which might have been a weakness of which she was ashamed. Yet, clear-headed and logical as Courtland was in his ordinary affairs, he was nevertheless not entirely free from that peculiar superstition which surrounds every man's romance. He believed there was something more than a mere coincidence in his unexpectedly finding himself in such favorable conditions for making her acquaintance. For the rest — if there was any rest — he would simply trust to fate. And so, believing himself a cool, sagacious reasoner, but being actually, as far as Miss Dows was concerned, as blind, fatuous, and unreasoning as any of her previous admirers, he rode complacently forward until he reached the lane that led to the Dows plantation.

Here a better kept roadway and fence, whose careful repair would have delighted Drummond, seemed to augur well for the new enterprise. Presently, even the old-fashioned local form of the fence, a slanting zigzag, gave way to the more direct line of post and rail in the Northern fashion. Beyond it presently appeared a long low frontage

of modern buildings which, to Courtland's surprise, were entirely new in structure and design. There was no reminiscence of the usual Southern porticoed gable or columned veranda. Yet it was not Northern either. The factory-like outline of façade was partly hidden in Cherokee rose and jessamine.

A long roofed gallery connected the buildings and became a veranda to one. A broad, well-rolled gravel drive led from the open gate to the newest building, which seemed to be the office; a smaller path diverged from it to the corner house, which, despite its severe simplicity, had a more residential appearance. Unlike Reed's house, there were no lounging servants or field hands to be seen; they were evidently attending to their respective duties. Dismounting, Courtland tied his horse to a post at the office door and took the smaller path to the corner house.

The door was open to the fragrant afternoon breeze wafted through the rose and jessamine. So, also, was a side door opening from the hall into a long parlor or sitting-room that ran the whole width of the house. Courtland entered it. It was prettily furnished, but everything had the air of freshness and of being uncharacteristically new. It was empty, but a faint hammering was audible on the rear wall of the house, through the two open French windows at the back, curtained with trailing vines, which gave upon a sun-lit courtyard. Courtland walked to the window. Just before it, on the ground, stood a small light ladder, which he gently put aside to gain a better view of the courtyard as he put on his hat, and stepped out of the open window.

In this attitude he suddenly felt his hat tipped from his head, followed almost instantaneously by a falling slipper, and the distinct impression of a very small foot on the crown of his head. An indescribable sensation passed over him. He hurriedly stepped back into the room, just as a small striped-stockinged foot was as hastily drawn up above

the top of the window with the feminine exclamation, "Good gracious me!"

Lingering for an instant, only to assure himself that the fair speaker had secured her foothold and was in no danger of falling, Courtland snatched up his hat, which had providentially fallen inside the room, and retreated ingloriously to the other end of the parlor. The voice came again from the window, and struck him as being very sweet and clear: —

"Sophy, is that *you?*"

Courtland discreetly retired to the hall. To his great relief a voice from the outside answered, "Whar, Miss Sally?"

"What did yo' move the ladder for? Yo' might have killed me."

"Fo' God, Miss Sally, I did n't move no ladder!"

"Don't tell me, but go down and get my slipper. And bring up some more nails."

Courtland waited silently in the hall. In a few moments he heard a heavy footstep outside the rear window. This was his opportunity. Reëntering the parlor somewhat ostentatiously he confronted a tall negro girl who was passing through the room carrying a tiny slipper in her hand. "Excuse me," he said politely, "but I could not find any one to announce me. Is Miss Dows at home?"

The girl instantly whipped the slipper behind her. "Is yo' wanting Miss Mirandy Dows," she asked, with great dignity, "oah Miss Sally Dows — her niece? Miss Mirandy 's bin gone to Atlanta for a week."

"I have a letter for Miss Miranda, but I shall be very glad if Miss Sally Dows will receive me," returned Courtland, handing the letter and his card to the girl.

She received them with a still greater access of dignity and marked deliberation. "It 's clean gone outer my mind, sah, ef Miss Sally is in de resumption of visitahs at dis houah. In fac', sah," she continued, with intensified

gravity and an exaggeration of thoughtfulness as the sounds of Miss Sally's hammering came shamelessly from the wall, "I doahn know exac'ly ef she 's engaged playin' de harp, practicin' de languages, or paintin' in oil and watah colors, o' givin' audiences to offishals from de Court House. I might be de houah for de one or de odder. But I 'll co· munícate wid her, sah, in de budwoh on de uppah fl· She backed dexterously, so as to keep the slipper be' her, but with no diminution of dignity, out of a side In another moment the hammering ceased, followed by the sound of rapid whispering without; a few tiny twigs and leaves slowly rustled to the ground, and then there was complete silence. He ventured to walk to the fateful window again.

Presently he heard a faint rustle at the other end of the room, and he turned. A sudden tremulousness swept along his pulses, and then they seemed to pause; he drew a deep breath that was almost a sigh, and remained motionless.

He had no preconceived idea of falling in love with Miss Sally at first sight, nor had he dreamed such a thing possible. Even the girlish face that he had seen in the locket, although it had stirred him with a singular emotion, had not suggested that. And the ideal he had evolved from it was never a potent presence. But the exquisitely pretty face and figure before him, although it might have been painted from his own fancy of her, was still something more and something unexpected. All that had gone before had never prepared him for the beautiful girl who now stood there. It was a poor explanation to say that Miss Sally was four or five years older than her picture, and that later experiences, enlarged capacity, a different life, and new ambition had impressed her youthful face with a refined mobility; it was a weird fancy to imagine that the blood of those who had died for her had in some vague, mysterious way imparted an actual fascination to her, and

he dismissed it. But even the most familiar spectator, like Sophy, could see that Miss Sally had the softest pink complexion, the silkiest hair, that looked as the floss of the Indian corn might look if curled, or golden spider threads if materialized, and eyes that were in bright gray harmony with both; that the frock of India muslin, albeit home-made, fitted her figure perfectly, from the azure bows on her shoulders to the ribbon around her waist; and that the hem of its billowy skirt showed a foot which had the reputation of being the smallest foot south of Mason and Dixon's Line! But it was something more intangible than this which kept Courtland breathless and silent.

"I'm not Miss Miranda Dows," said the vision, with a frankness that was half childlike and half practical, as she extended a little hand, "but I can talk 'fahm' with yo' about as well as aunty, and I reckon from what Major Reed says heah," holding up the letter between her fingers, "as long as yo' get the persimmons yo' don't mind what kind o' pole yo' knock 'em down with."

The voice that carried this speech was so fresh, clear, and sweet that I am afraid Courtland thought little of its bluntness or its conventional transgressions. But it brought him his own tongue quite unemotionally and quietly. "I don't know what was in that note, Miss Dows, but I can hardly believe that Major Reed ever put my present felicity quite in that way."

Miss Sally laughed. Then with a charming exaggeration she waved her little hand towards the sofa.

"There! Yo' naturally wanted a little room for that, co'nnle, but now that yo' 've got it off, — and mighty pooty it was, too, — yo' can sit down." And with that she sank down at one end of the sofa, prettily drew aside a white billow of skirt so as to leave ample room for Courtland at the other, and clasping her fingers over her knees, looked demurely expectant.

"But let me hope that I am not disturbing you unseasonably," said Courtland, catching sight of the fateful little slipper beneath her skirt, and remembering the window. "I was so preoccupied in thinking of your aunt as the business manager of these estates that I quite forgot that she might have a lady's hours for receiving."

"We have n't got any company hours," said Miss Sally, "and we have n't just now any servants for company manners, for we 're short-handed in the fields and barns. When yo' came I was nailing up the laths for the vines outside, because we could n't spare carpenters from the factory. But," she added, with a faint accession of mischief in her voice, "yo' came to talk about the fahm ?"

"Yes," said Courtland, rising, "but not to interrupt the work on it. Will you let me help you nail up the laths on the wall ? I have some experience that way, and we can talk as we work. Do oblige me !"

The young girl looked at him brightly.

"Well, now, there 's nothing mean about *that*. Yo' mean it for sure ?"

"Perfectly. I shall feel so much less as if I was enjoying your company under false pretenses."

"Yo' just wait here, then."

She jumped from the sofa, ran out of the room, and returned presently, tying the string of a long striped cotton blouse — evidently an extra one of Sophy's — behind her back as she returned. It was gathered under her oval chin by a tape also tied behind her, while her fair hair was tucked under the usual red bandana handkerchief of the negro housemaid. It is scarcely necessary to add that the effect was bewitching.

"But," said Miss Sally, eying her guest's smartly fitting frock coat, "yo' 'll spoil yo'r pooty clothes, sure ! Take off yo'r coat — don't mind me — and work in yo'r shirt-sleeves."

Courtland obediently flung aside his coat and followed his active hostess through the French window to the platform outside. Above them a wooden ledge or cornice, projecting several inches, ran the whole length of the building. It was on this that Miss Sally had evidently found a foothold while she was nailing up a trellis-work of laths between it and the windows of the second floor. Courtland found the ladder, mounted to the ledge, followed by the young girl, who smilingly waived his proffered hand to help her up, and the two gravely set to work. But in the intervals of hammering and tying up the vines Miss Sally's tongue was not idle. Her talk was as fresh, as quaint, as original as herself, and yet so practical and to the purpose of Courtland's visit as to excuse his delight in it and her own fascinating propinquity. Whether she stopped to take a nail from between her pretty lips when she spoke to him, or whether holding on perilously with one hand to the trellis, while she gesticulated with the hammer, pointing out the divisions of the plantation from her coign of vantage, he thought she was as clear and convincing to his intellect as she was distracting to his senses.

She told him how the war had broken up their home in Pineville, sending her father to serve in the Confederate councils of Richmond, and leaving her aunt and herself to manage the property alone ; how the estate had been devastated, the house destroyed, and how they had barely time to remove a few valuables ; how, although *she* had always been opposed to secession and the war, she had not gone North, preferring to stay with her people, and take with them the punishment of the folly she had foreseen. How after the war and her father's death she and her aunt had determined to "reconstruct *themselves*" after their own fashion on this bit of property, which had survived their fortunes because it had always been considered valueless and unprofitable for negro labor. How at first they had undergone serious

difficulty, through the incompetence and ignorance of the freed laborer, and the equal apathy and prejudice of their neighbors. How they had gradually succeeded with the adoption of new methods and ideas that she herself had conceived, which she now briefly and clearly stated. Courtland listened with a new, breathless, and almost superstitious interest: they were *his own theories* — perfected and demonstrated!

"But you must have had capital for this?"

Ah, yes! that was where they were fortunate. There were some French cousins with whom she had once stayed in Paris, who advanced enough to stock the estate. There were some English friends of her father's, old blockade runners, who had taken shares, provided them with more capital, and imported some skilled laborers and a kind of steward or agent to represent them. But they were getting on, and perhaps it was better for their reputation with their neighbors that they had not been *beholden* to the "No'th." Seeing a cloud pass over Courtland's face, the young lady added, with an affected sigh, and the first touch of feminine coquetry which had invaded their wholesome camaraderie: —

"Yo' ought to have found us out *before,* co'nnle."

For an impulsive moment Courtland felt like telling her then and there the story of his romantic quest; but the reflection that they were standing on a narrow ledge with no room for the emotions, and that Miss Sally had just put a nail in her mouth and a start might be dangerous, checked him. To this may be added a new jealousy of her previous experiences, which he had not felt before. Nevertheless, he managed to say with some effusion: —

"But I hope we are not too late *now.* I think my principals are quite ready and able to buy up any English or French investor now or to come."

"Yo' might try yo' hand on that one," said Miss Sally,

pointing to a young fellow who had just emerged from the office and was crossing the courtyard. "He 's the English agent."

He was square-shouldered and round-headed, fresh and clean looking in his white flannels, but with an air of being utterly distinct and alien to everything around him, and mentally and morally irreconcilable to it. As he passed the house he glanced shyly at it; his eye brightened and his manner became self-conscious as he caught sight of the young girl, but changed again when he saw her companion. Courtland likewise was conscious of a certain uneasiness; it was one thing to be helping Miss Sally *alone,* but certainly another thing to be doing so under the eye of a stranger; and I am afraid that he met the stony observation of the Englishman with an equally cold stare. Miss Sally alone retained her languid ease and self-possession. She called out, "Wait a moment, Mr. Champney," slipped lightly down the ladder, and leaning against it with one foot on its lowest rung awaited his approach.

"I reckoned yo' might be passing by," she said, as he came forward. "Co'nnle Courtland," with an explanatory wave of the hammer towards her companion, who remained erect and slightly stiffened on the cornice, "is no relation to those figures along the frieze of the Redlands Court House, but a No'th'n officer, a friend of Major Reed's, who 's come down here to look after So'th'n property for some No'th'n capitalists. Mr. Champney," she continued, turning and lifting her eyes to Courtland as she indicated Champney with her hammer, "when he is n't talking English, seeing English, thinking English, dressing English, and wondering why God did n't make everything English, is trying to do the same for *his* folks. Mr. Champney, Co'nnle Courtland. Co'nnle Courtland, Mr. Champney!" The two men bowed formally. "And now, co'nnle, if

yo' 'll come down, Mr. Champney will show yo' round the fahm. When yo' 've got through yo' 'll find me here at work."

Courtland would have preferred, and half looked for her company and commentary on this round of inspection, but he concealed his disappointment and descended. It did not exactly please him that Champney seemed relieved, and appeared to accept him as a *bona fide* stranger who could not possibly interfere with any confidential relations that he might have with Miss Sally. Nevertheless, he met the Englishman's offer to accompany him with polite gratitude, and they left the house together.

In less than an hour they returned. It had not even taken that time for Courtland to discover that the real improvements and the new methods had originated with Miss Sally; that she was virtually the controlling influence there, and that she was probably retarded rather than assisted by the old-fashioned and traditional conservatism of the company of which Champney was steward. It was equally plain, however, that the young fellow was dimly conscious of this, and was frankly communicative about it.

"You see, over there they work things in a different way, and, by Jove! they can't understand that there is any other, don't you know? They 're always wigging me as if I could help it, although I've tried to explain the nigger business, and all that, don't you know? They want Miss Dows to refer her plans to me, and expect me to report on them, and then they 'll submit them to the Board and wait for its decision. Fancy Miss Dows doing that! But, by Jove! they can't conceive of her *at all* over there, don't you know?"

"Which Miss Dows do you mean?" asked Courtland dryly.

"Miss Sally, of course," said the young fellow briskly. "*She* manages everything — her aunt included. She can

make those niggers work when no one else can, a word or smile from her is enough. She can make terms with dealers and contractors — her own terms, too — when they won't look at *my* figures. By Jove! she even gets points out of those traveling agents and inventors, don't you know, who come along the road with patents and samples. She got one of those lightning-rod and wire-fence men to show her how to put up an arbor for her trailing roses. Why, when I first saw *you* up on the cornice, I thought you were some other chap that she'd asked — don't you know — that is, at first, of course! — you know what I mean — ha, by Jove! — before we were introduced, don't you know."

"I think I *offered* to help Miss Dows," said Courtland, with a quickness that he at once regretted.

"So did *he*, don't you know? Miss Sally does not *ask* anybody. Don't you see? a fellow don't like to stand by and see a young lady like her doing such work." Vaguely aware of some infelicity in his speech, he awkwardly turned the subject, "I don't think I shall stay here long, myself."

"You expect to return to England?" asked Courtland.

"Oh no! But I shall go out of the company's service and try my own hand. There's a good bit of land about three miles from here that's in the market, and I think I could make something out of it. A fellow ought to settle down and be his own master," he answered tentatively, "eh?"

"But how will Miss Dows be able to spare you?" asked Courtland, uneasily conscious that he was assuming an indifference.

"Oh, I'm not much use to her, don't you know — at least not *here*. But I might, if I had my own land and if we were neighbors. I told you *she* runs the place, no matter who's here, or whose money is invested."

"I presume you are speaking now of young Miss Dows?" said Courtland dryly.

"Miss Sally — of course — always," said Champney simply. "She runs the shop."

"Were there not some French investors — relations of Miss Dows? Does anybody represent *them?*" asked Courtland pointedly.

Yet he was not quite prepared for the naïve change in his companion's face. "No. There was a sort of French cousin who used to be a good deal to the fore, don't you know? But I rather fancy he did n't come here to look after the *property*," returned Champney, with a quick laugh. "I think the aunt must have written to his friends, for they 'called him off,' and I don't think Miss Sally broke her heart about him. She 's not that sort of girl — eh? She could have her pick of the State if she went in for that sort of thing — eh?"

Although this was exactly what Courtland was thinking, it pleased him to answer in a distrait sort of fashion, "Certainly, I should think so," and to relapse into an apparently business abstraction.

"I think I won't go in," continued Champney, as they neared the house again. "I suppose you 'll have something more to say to Miss Dows. If there 's anything else you want of *me*, come to the office. But *she 'll* know. And — er — er — if you 're — er — staying long in this part of the country, ride over and look me up, don't you know? and have a smoke and a julep; I have a boy who knows how to mix them, and I 've some old brandy sent me from the other side. Good-by."

More awkward in his kindliness than in his simple business confidences, but apparently equally honest in both, he shook Courtland's hand and walked away. Courtland turned towards the house. He had seen the farm and its improvements; he had found some of his own ideas practi-

cally discounted; clearly there was nothing left for him to do but to thank his hostess and take his leave. But he felt far more uneasy than when he had arrived; and there was a singular sense of incompleteness in his visit that he could not entirely account for. His conversation with Champney had complicated — he knew not why — his previous theories of Miss Dows, and although he was half conscious that this had nothing to do with the business that brought him there, he tried to think that it had. If Miss Sally was really — a — a — distracting elemen[t] to contiguous man, it was certainly something to be considered in a matter of business of which she would take a managerial part. It was true that Champney had said she was "not that sort of girl," but this was the testimony of one who was clearly under her influence. He entered the house through the open French window. The parlor was deserted. He walked through the front hall and porch; no one was there. He lingered a few moments, a slight chagrin beginning to mingle with his uneasiness. She might have been on the lookout for him. She or Sophy must have seen him returning. He would ring for Sophy, and leave his thanks and regrets for her mistress. He looked for a bell, touched it, but on being confronted with Sophy, changed his mind and asked to *see* Miss Dows. In the interval between her departure and the appearance of Miss Sally he resolved to do the very thing which he had dismissed from his thoughts but an hour before as ill-timed and doubtful. He had the photograph and letter in his pocket; he would make them his excuse for personally taking leave of her.

She entered with her fair eyebrows lifted in a pretty surprise.

"I declare to goodness, I thought yo' 'd ridden over to the red barn and gone home from there. I got through my work on the vines earlier than I thought. One of

Judge Garret's nephews dropped in in time to help me with the last row. Yo' need n't have troubled yo'self to send up for me for mere company manners, but Sophy says yo' looked sort of 'anxious and particular' when yo' asked for me — so I suppose yo' want to see me for something."

Mentally objurgating Sophy, and with an unpleasant impression in his mind of the unknown neighbor who had been helping Miss Sally in his place, he nevertheless tried to collect himself gallantly.

"I don't know what my expression conveyed to Sophy," he said, with a smile, "but I trust that what I have to tell you may be interesting enough to make you forget my second intrusion." He paused, and still smiling continued: "For more than three years, Miss Dows, you have more or less occupied my thoughts; and although we have actually met to-day only for the first time, I have during that time carried your image with me constantly. Even this meeting, which was only the result of an accident, I had been seeking for three years. I find you here under your own peaceful vine and fig-tree, and yet three years ago you came to me out of the thunder-cloud of battle."

"My good gracious!" said Miss Sally.

She had been clasping her knee with her linked fingers, but separated them and leaned backward on the sofa with affected consternation, but an expression of growing amusement in her bright eyes. Courtland saw the mistake of his tone, but it was too late to change it now. He handed her the locket and the letter, and briefly, and perhaps a little more seriously, recounted the incident that had put him in possession of them. But he entirely suppressed the more dramatic and ghastly details, and his own superstition and strange prepossession towards her.

Miss Sally took the articles without a tremor, or the least deepening or paling of the delicate, faint suffusion of her cheek. When she had glanced over the letter, which

appeared to be brief, she said, with smiling, half-pitying tranquillity: —

"Yes! — it *was* that poor Chet Brooks, sure! I heard that he was killed at Snake River. It was just like him to rush in and get killed the first pop! And all for nothing, too, — pure foolishness!"

Shocked, yet relieved, but uneasy under both sensations, Courtland went on blindly: —

"But he was not the only one, Miss Dows. There was another man picked up who also had your picture."

"Yes — Joyce Masterton. They sent it to me. But you did n't kill *him*, too?"

"I don't know that I personally killed either," he said a little coldly. He paused, and continued with a gravity which he could not help feeling very inconsistent and even ludicrous: "They were brave men, Miss Dows."

"To have worn my picture?" said Miss Sally brightly.

"To have *thought* they had so much to live for, and yet to have willingly laid down their lives for what they believed was right."

"Yo' did n't go huntin' me for three years to tell *me*, a So'th'n girl, that So'th'n men know how to fight, did yo', co'nnle?" returned the young lady, with the slightest lifting of her head and drooping of her blue veined lids in a divine hauteur. "They were always ready enough for that, even among themselves. It was much easier for these pooah boys to fight a thing out than think it out, or work it out. Yo' folks in the No'th learned to do all three; that 's where you got the grip on us. Yo' look surprised, co'nnle."

"I did n't expect you would look at it — quite in — in — that way," said Courtland awkwardly.

"I am sorry I disappointed yo' after yo' 'd taken such a heap o' trouble," returned the young lady, with a puzzling assumption of humility as she rose and smoothed out her skirts, "but I could n't know exactly what yo' might be

expecting after three years; if I *had*, I might have put on mo'ning." She stopped and adjusted a straying tendril of her hair with the sharp corner of the dead man's letter. "But I thank yo', all the same, co'nnle. It was real good in yo' to think of toting these things over here." And sh' held out her hand frankly.

Courtland took it with the sickening consciousness that for the last five minutes he had been an unconscionable ass. He could not prolong the interview after she had so significantly risen. If he had only taken his leave and kept the letter and locket for a later visit, perhaps when they were older friends! It was too late now. He bent over her hand for a moment, again thanked her for her courtesy, and withdrew. A moment later she heard the receding beat of his horse's hoofs on the road.

She opened the drawer of a brass-handled cabinet, and after a moment's critical survey of her picture in the dead man's locket, tossed it and the letter into the recesses of the drawer. Then she stopped, removed her little slipper from her foot, looked at *that*, too, thoughtfully, and called "Sophy!"

"Miss Sally?" said the girl, reappearing at the door.

"Are you sure you did not move that ladder?"

"I 'clare to goodness, Miss Sally, I never teched it!"

Miss Sally directed a critical glance at her handmaiden's red-coifed head. "No," she said to herself softly, "it felt nicer than wool, anyway!"

CHAPTER III

In spite of the awkward termination of his visit, — or perhaps *because* of it, — Courtland called again at the plantation within the week. But this time he was accompanied by Drummond, and was received by Miss Miranda Dows, a tall, aquiline-nosed spinster of fifty, whose old-time politeness had become slightly affected, and whose old beliefs had given way to a half-cynical acceptance of new facts. Mr. Drummond, delighted with the farm and its management, was no less fascinated by Miss Sally, while Courtland was now discreet enough to divide his attentions between her and her aunt, with the result that he was far from participating in Champney's conviction of Miss Miranda's unimportance. To the freedmen she still represented the old implacable task-mistress, and it was evident that they superstitiously believed that she still retained a vague power of overriding the Fourteenth Amendment at her pleasure, and was only to be restrained by the mediation of the good-humored and sensible Miss Sally. Courtland was quick to see the value of this influence in the transition state of the freedmen, and pointed it out to his principal. Drummond's previous doubts and skepticism, already weakened by Miss Sally's fascinations, vanished entirely at this prospect of beneficially utilizing these lingering evils of slavery. He was convinced, he was even enthusiastic. The foreign investors were men to be bought out; the estate improved and enlarged by the company, and the fair owners retained in the management and control. Like most prejudiced men, Drummond's conversion was sudden and extreme, and,

being a practical man, was at once acted upon. At a second and third interview the preliminaries were arranged, and in three weeks from Courtland's first visit, the Dows' plantation and part of Major Reed's were merged in the "Drummond Syndicate," and placed beyond financial uncertainty. Courtland remained to represent the company as superintendent at Redlands, and with the transfer of the English investments Champney retired, as he had suggested, to a smaller venture of his own, on a plantation a few miles distant which the company had been unable to secure.

During this interval Courtland had frequent interviews with Miss Sally, and easy and unrestrained access to her presence. He had never again erred on the side of romance or emotion; he had never again referred to the infelix letter and photograph; and, without being obliged to confine himself strictly to business affairs, he had maintained an even, quiet, neighborly intercourse with her. Much of this was the result of his own self-control and soldierly training, and gave little indication of the deeper feeling that he was conscious lay beneath it. At times he caught the young girl's eyes fixed upon him with a mischievous curiosity. A strange thrill went through him; there are few situations so subtle and dangerous as the accidental confidences and understandings of two young people of opposite sex, even though the question of any sentimental inclination be still in abeyance. Courtland knew that Miss Sally remembered the too serious attitude he had taken towards her past. She might laugh at it, and even resent it, but she *knew* it, remembered it, knew that *he* did, and this precious knowledge was confined to themselves. It was in their minds when there was a pause in their more practical and conventional conversation, and was even revealed in the excessive care which Miss Sally later took to avert at the right moment her mischievously smiling eyes. Once she went farther. Courtland had just finished explaining to her a plan for substituting

small farm buildings for the usual half-cultivated garden patches dear to the negro field-hand, and had laid down the drawings on the table in the office, when the young lady, leaning against it with her hands behind her, fixed her bright gray eyes on his serious face.

"I vow and protest, co'nnle," she said, dropping into one of the quaint survivals of an old-time phraseology peculiar to her people, "I never allowed yo' could just give yo'self up to business, soul and body, as yo' do, when I first met yo' that day."

"Why, what did you think me?" he asked quickly.

Miss Sally, who had a Southern aptitude for gesture, took one little hand from behind her, twirled it above her head with a pretty air of disposing of some airy nothing in a presumably masculine fashion, and said, "Oh, *that*."

"I am afraid I did not impress you then as a very practical man," he said, with a faint color.

"I thought you roosted rather high, co'nnle, to pick up many worms in the mo'ning. But," she added, with a dazzling smile, "I reckon from what yo' said about the photograph, yo' thought *I* was n't exactly what yo' believed I ought to be, either."

He would have liked to tell her then and there that he would have been content if those bright, beautiful eyes had never kindled with anything but love or womanly aspiration; if that soft, lazy, caressing voice had never been lifted beyond the fireside or domestic circle; if the sunny, tendriled hair and pink ears had never inclined to anything but whispered admiration; and if the graceful, lithe, erect figure, so independent and self-contained, had been satisfied to lean only upon his arm for support. He was conscious that this had been in his mind when he first saw her; he was equally conscious that she was more bewilderingly fascinating to him in her present inaccessible intelligence and practicality.

"I confess," he said, looking into her eyes with a vague smile, "I did not expect you would be so forgetful of some one who had evidently cared for you."

"Meaning Mr. Chet Brooks, or Mr. Joyce Masterton, or both. That 's like most yo' men, co'nnle. Yo' reckon because a girl pleases yo' she ought to be grateful all her life — and yo'rs, too! Yo' think different now! But yo' need n't act up to it quite so much." She made a little deprecating gesture with her disengaged hand as if to ward off any retaliating gallantry. "I ain't speaking for myself, co'nnle. Yo' and me are good enough friends. But the girls round here think yo' 're a trifle too much taken up with rice and niggers. And looking at it even in yo'r light, co'nnle, it ain't *business*. Yo' want to keep straight with Major Reed, so it would be just as well to square the major's women folks. Tavy and Gussie Reed ain't exactly poisonous, co'nnle, and yo' might see one or the other home from church next Sunday. The Sunday after that, just to show yo' ain't particular, and that yo' go in for being a regular beau, yo' might walk home with *me*. Don't be frightened — I 've got a better gown than this. It 's a new one, just come home from Louisville, and I 'll wear it for the occasion."

He did not dare to say that the quaint frock she was then wearing — a plain "checked" household gingham used for children's pinafores, with its ribbons of the same pattern, gathered in bows at the smart apron pockets — had become a part of her beauty, for he was already hopelessly conscious that she was lovely in anything, and he might be impelled to say so. He thanked her gravely and earnestly, but without gallantry or effusion, and had the satisfaction of seeing the mischief in her eyes increase in proportion to his seriousness, and heard her say with affected concern: "Bear up, co'nnle! Don't let it worry yo' till the time comes," and took his leave.

On the following Sunday he was present at the Redlands Episcopal Church, and after the service stood with outward composure but some inward chafing among the gallant youth who, after the local fashion, had ranged themselves outside the doors of the building. He was somewhat surprised to find Mr. Champney, evidently as much out of place as himself, but less self-contained, waiting in the crowd of expectant cavaliers. Although convinced that the young Englishman had come only to see Miss Sally, he was glad to share his awkward isolation with another stranger, and greeted him pleasantly. The Dows' pew, being nearer to the entrance than the Reeds', gave up its occupants first. Colonel Courtland lifted his hat to Miss Miranda and her niece at the same moment that Champney moved forward and ranged himself beside them. Miss Sally, catching Courtland's eye, showed the whites of her own in a backward glance of mischievous significance to indicate the following Reeds. When they approached, Courtland joined them, and finding himself beside Miss Octavia entered into conversation. Apparently the suppressed passion and sardonic melancholy of that dark-eyed young lady spurred him to a lighter, gayer humor even in proportion as Miss Sally's good-natured levity and sunny practicality always made him serious. They presently fell to the rear with other couples, and were soon quite alone.

A little haughty, but tall and erect in her well-preserved black grenadine dress, which gave her the appearance of a youthful but implacable widow, Miss Reed declared she had not seen the co'nnle for "a coon's age," and certainly had not expected to have the honor of his company as long as there were niggers to be elevated or painted to look like white men. She hoped that he and paw and Sally Dows were happy! They had n't yet got so far as to put up a nigger preacher in the place of Mr. Symes, their rector, but she understood that there was some talk of running Hanni-

bal Johnson — Miss Dows' coachman — for county judge next year! No! she had not heard that the co'nnle *himself* had thought of running for the office! He might laugh at her as much as he liked — he seemed to be in better spirits than when she first saw him — only she would like to know if it was "No'th'n style" to laugh coming home from church? Of course if it *was* she would have to adopt it with the Fourteenth Amendment. But, just now, she noticed the folks were staring at them, and Miss Sally Dows had turned round to look. Nevertheless, Miss Octavia's sallow cheek nearest the colonel — the sunny side — had taken a faint brunette's flush, and the corners of her proud mouth were slightly lifted.

"But, candidly, Miss Reed, don't you think that you would prefer to have old Hannibal, whom you know, as county judge, than a stranger and a Northern man like *me?*"

Miss Reed's dark eyes glanced sideways at the handsome face and elegant figure beside her. Something like a saucy smile struggled to her thin lips.

"There might n't be much to choose, co'nnle."

"I admit it. We should both acknowledge our mistress, and be like wax in her hands."

"Yo' ought to make that pooty speech to Sally Dows, she 's generally mistress around here. But," she added, suddenly fixing her eyes on him, "how does it happen that yo' ain't walking with her instead of that Englishman? Yo' know that it 's as plain as day that he took that land over there just to be near her, when he was no longer agent."

But Courtland was always master of himself and quite at ease regarding Miss Sally when not in that lady's presence. "You forget," he said smilingly, "that I 'm still a stranger and know little of the local gossip; and if I did know it, I am afraid we did n't bargain to buy up with the *land* Mr. Champney's personal interest in the *landlady*."

"Yo' 'd have had your hands full, for I reckon she 's pooty heavily mortgaged in that fashion, already," returned Miss Reed, with more badinage than spitefulness in the suggestion. "And Mr. Champney was run pooty close by a French cousin of hers when he was here. Yo' have n't got any French books to lend me, co'nnle — have yo' ? Paw says you read a heap of French, and I find it mighty hard to keep up *my* practice since I left the convent at St. Louis, for paw don't know what sort of books to order, and I reckon he makes awful mistakes sometimes."

The conversation here turning upon polite literature, it appeared that Miss Octavia's French reading, through a shy, proud innocence and an imperfect knowledge of the wicked subtleties of the language, was somewhat broad and unconventional for a young lady. Courtland promised to send her some books, and even ventured to suggest some American and English novels not intensely "No'th'n" nor "metaphysical" — according to the accepted Southern beliefs. A new respect and pitying interest in this sullen, solitary girl, cramped by tradition, and bruised rather than enlightened by sad experiences, came over him. He found himself talking quite confidentially to the lifted head, arched eyebrows, and aquiline nose beside him, and even thinking what a handsome high-bred *brother* she might have been to some one. When they had reached the house, in compliance with the familiar custom, he sat down on one of the lower steps of the veranda, while she, shaking out her skirt, took a seat a step or two above him. This enabled him, after the languid local fashion, to lean on his elbow and gaze up into the eyes of the young lady, while she with equal languor looked down upon him. But in the present instance Miss Reed leaned forward suddenly, and darting a sharp glance into his very consciousness said : —

"And yo' mean to say, co'nnle, there 's nothing between yo' and Sally Dows ? "

Courtland neither flushed, trembled, grew confused, nor prevaricated.

"We are good friends, I think," he replied quietly, without evasion or hesitation.

Miss Reed looked at him thoughtfully, "I reckon that is so — and no more. And that 's why yo' 've been so lucky in everything," she said slowly.

"I don't think I quite understand," returned Courtland, smiling. "Is this a paradox — or a consolation?"

"It 's the *truth*," said Miss Reed gravely. "Those who try to be anything more to Sally Dows lose their luck."

"That is — are rejected by her. Is she really so relentless?" continued Courtland gayly.

"I mean that they lose their luck in everything. Something is sure to happen. And *she* can't help it either."

"Is this a sibylline warning, Miss Reed?"

"No. It 's nigger superstition. It came from Mammy Judy, Sally's old nurse. It 's part of their regular Hoo-doo. She bewitched Miss Sally when she was a baby, so that everybody is bound to *her* as long as they care for her, and she is n't bound to *them* in any way. All their luck goes to her as soon as the spell is on them," she added darkly.

"I think I know the rest," returned Courtland, with still greater solemnity. "You gather the buds of the witch-hazel in April when the moon is full. You then pluck three hairs from the young lady's right eyebrow when she is n't looking" —

"Yo' can laugh, co'nnle, for yo' 're lucky — because yo' 're free."

"I 'm not sure of that," he said gallantly, "for I ought to be riding at this moment over to the Infirmary to visit my Sunday sick. If being made to pleasantly forget one's time and duty is a sign of witchcraft I am afraid Mammy Judy's enchantments were not confined to only one Southern young lady."

The sound of quick footsteps on the gravel path caused them both to look up. A surly looking young fellow, ostentatiously booted and spurred, and carrying a heavy rawhide riding-whip in his swinging hand, was approaching them. Deliberately, yet with uneasy self-consciousness, ignoring the presence of Courtland, he nodded abruptly to Miss Reed, ascended the steps, brushed past them both without pausing, and entered the house.

"Is that yo'r manners, Mr. Tom?" called the young lady after him, a slight flush rising to her shallow cheek. The young man muttered something from the hall which Courtland did not catch. "It 's Cousin Tom Higbee," she explained half disdainfully. "He 's had some ugliness with his horse, I reckon; but paw ought to teach him how to behave. And — I don't think he likes No'th'n men," she added gravely.

Courtland, who had kept his temper with his full understanding of the intruder's meaning, smiled as he took Miss Reed's hand in parting. "That 's quite enough explanation, and I don't know why it should n't be even an apology."

Yet the incident left little impression on him as he strolled back to Redlands. It was not the first time he had tasted the dregs of former sectional hatred in incivility and discourtesy, but as it seldom came from his old personal antagonists — the soldiers — and was confined to the callow youth, previous non-combatants and politicians, he could afford to overlook it. He did not see Miss Sally during the following week.

CHAPTER IV

On the next Sunday he was early at church. But he had perhaps accented the occasion by driving there in a light buggy behind a fast thoroughbred, possibly selected more to the taste of a smart cavalry officer than an agricultural superintendent. He was already in a side pew, his eyes dreamily fixed on the Prayer-Book ledge before him, when there was a rustle at the church door, and a thrill of curiosity and admiration passed over the expectant congregation. It was the entrance of the Dows party, Miss Sally well to the fore. She was in her new clothes, the latest fashion in Louisville, the latest but two in Paris and New York.

It was over twenty years ago. I shall not imperil the effect of that lovely vision by recalling to the eye of to-day a fashion of yesterday. Enough, that it enabled her to set her sweet face and vapory golden hair in a horseshoe frame of delicate flowers, and to lift her oval chin out of a bewildering mist of tulle. Nor did a certain light polonaise conceal the outlines of her charming figure. Even those who were constrained to whisper to each other that "Miss Sally" must "be now going on twenty-five," did so because she still carried the slender graces of seventeen. The organ swelled as if to welcome her; as she took her seat a ray of sunlight, that would have been cruel and searching to any other complexion, drifted across the faint pink of her cheeks, and nestling in her nebulous hair became itself transfigured. A few stained-glass Virtues on the windows did not come out of this effulgence as triumphantly, and it

was small wonder that the devotional eyes of the worshipers wandered from them to the face of Sally Dows.

When the service was over, as the congregation filed slowly into the aisle, Courtland slipped mutely behind her. As she reached the porch he said in an undertone: "I brought my horse and buggy. I thought you might possibly allow me to drive" — But he was stopped by a distressful knitting of her golden brows. "No," she said quickly, but firmly, "you must not — it won't do." As Courtland hesitated in momentary perplexity, she smiled sweetly: "We 'll walk round by the cemetery, if you like; it will take about as long as a drive." Courtland vanished, gave hurried instructions and a dollar to a lounging negro, and rejoined Miss Sally as the delighted and proud freedman drove out of the gate. Miss Sally heaved a slight sigh as the gallant equipage passed. "It was a mighty pooty turnout, co'nnle, and I 'd have just admired to go, but it would have been rather hard on the other folks. There 's the Reeds and Maxwells and Robertsons that are too pooah to keep blood horses, and too proud to ride behind anything else. It would n't be the right thing for us to go whirling by, scattering our dust over them." There was something so subtly pleasant in this implied partnership of responsibility, that Courtland forgot the abrupt refusal and thought only of the tact that prompted it. Nevertheless, here a spell seemed to fall upon his usually ready speech. Now that they were together for the first time in a distinctly social fashion, he found himself vacantly, meaninglessly silent, content to walk beside this charming, summery presence, brushed by its delicate draperies, and inhaling its freshness. Presently it spoke.

"It would take more than a thousand feet of lumber to patch up the cowsheds beyond the Moseley pasture, and an entirely new building with an improved dairy would require only about two thousand more. All the old material would

come in good for fencing, and could be used with the new posts and rails. Don't yo' think it would be better to have an out-and-out new building?"

"Yes, certainly," returned Courtland a little confusedly. He had not calculated upon this practical conversation, and was the more disconcerted as they were passing some of the other couples, who had purposely lingered to overhear them.

"And," continued the young girl brightly, "the freight question is getting to be a pretty serious one. Aunt Miranda holds some shares in the Briggsville branch line, and thinks something could be done with the directors for a new tariff of charges if she put a pressure on them; Tyler says that there was some talk of their reducing it one sixteenth per cent. before we move this year's crop."

Courtland glanced quickly at his companion's face. It was grave, but there was the faintest wrinkling of the corner of the eyelid nearest him. "Had we not better leave these serious questions until to-morrow?" he said, smiling.

Miss Sally opened her eyes demurely.

"Why, yo' seemed *so* quiet, I reckoned yo' must be full of business this morning; but if yo' prefer company talk, we 'll change the subject. They say that yo' and Miss Reed did n't have much trouble to find one last Sunday. She don't usually talk much, but she keeps up a power of thinking. I should reckon," she added, suddenly eying him critically, "that yo' and she might have a heap o' things to say to each other. She 's a good deal in yo' fashion, co'nnle, she don't forget, but"— more slowly — "I don't know that *that 's* altogether the best thing for *yo'!*"

Courtland lifted his eyes with affected consternation. 'If this is in the light of another mysterious warning, Miss Dows, I warn you that my intellect is already tottering with them. Last Sunday Miss Reed thrilled me for an

hour with superstition and Cassandra-like prophecy. Don't things ever happen accidentally here, and without warning?"

"I mean," returned the young lady, with her usual practical directness, "that Tave Reed remembers a good many horrid things about the wah that she ought to forget, but don't. But," she continued, looking at him curiously, "she allows she was mighty cut up by her cousin's manner to yo'."

"I am afraid that Miss Reed was more annoyed than I was," said Courtland. "I should be very sorry if she attached any importance to it," he added earnestly.

"And *yo'* don't?" continued Miss Sally.

"No. Why should I?" She noticed, however, that he had slightly drawn himself up a little more erect, and she smiled as he continued, "I dare say I should feel as he does if I were in his place."

"But *yo'* would n't do anything underhanded," she said quietly. As he glanced at her quickly she added dryly: "Don't trust too much to people always acting in yo' fashion, co'nnle. And don't think too much nor too little of what yo' hear here. Yo' 're just the kind of man to make a good many silly enemies, and as many foolish friends. And I don't know which will give yo' the most trouble. Only don't yo' underrate *either*, or hold yo' head so high yo' don't see what 's crawlin' around yo'. That 's why, in a copperhead swamp, a horse is bitten oftener than a hog."

She smiled, yet with knitted brows and such a pretty affectation of concern for her companion that he suddenly took heart.

"I wish I had *one* friend I could call my own," he said boldly, looking straight into her eyes. "I 'd care little for other friends, and fear no enemies."

"Yo' 're right, co'nnle," she said, ostentatiously slanting her parasol in a marvelous simulation of hiding a purely

imaginative blush on a cheek that was perfectly infantine in its unchanged pink; "company talk is much pootier than what we 've been saying. And — meaning me — for I reckon yo' would n't say that of any other girl but the one yo' 're walking with — what 's the matter with *me?*"

He could not help smiling, though he hesitated. "Nothing! but others have been disappointed."

"And that bothers *yo'?*"

"I mean *I* have as yet had no right to put your feelings to any test, while"—

"Poor Chet had, yo' were going to say! Well, here we are at the cemetery! I reckoned yo' were bound to get back to the dead again before we 'd gone far, and that 's why I thought we might take the cemetery on our way. It may put me in a more proper frame of mind to please yo'."

As he raised his eyes he could not repress a slight start. He had not noticed before that they had passed through a small gateway on diverging from the road, and was quite unprepared to find himself on the edge of a gentle slope leading to a beautiful valley, and before him a long vista of tombs, white headstones and low crosses, edged by drooping cypress and trailing feathery vines. Some vines had fallen and been caught in long loops from bough to bough, like funeral garlands, and here and there the tops of isolated palmettos lifted a cluster of hearselike plumes. Yet in spite of this dominance of sombre but graceful shadow, the drooping delicacy of dark-tasseled foliage and leafy fringes, and the waving mourning veils of gray, translucent moss, a glorious vivifying Southern sun smiled and glittered everywhere as through tears. The balm of bay, southernwood, pine, and syringa breathed through the long alleys; the stimulating scent of roses moved with every zephyr, and the closer odors of jessamine, honeysuckle, and orange flowers hung heavily in the hollows. It seemed

to Courtland like the mourning of beautiful and youthful widowhood, seductive even in its dissembling trappings, provocative in the contrast of its own still strong virility. Everywhere the grass grew thick and luxuriant; the quick earth was teeming with the germination of the dead below.

They moved slowly along side by side, speaking only of the beauty of the spot and the glory of that summer day, which seemed to have completed its perfection here. Perhaps from the heat, the overpowering perfume, or some unsuspected sentiment, the young lady became presently as silent and preoccupied as her companion. She began to linger and loiter behind, hovering like a butterfly over some flowering shrub or clustered sheaf of lilies, until, encountered suddenly in her floating draperies, she might have been taken for a somewhat early and far too becoming ghost. It seemed to him, also, that her bright eyes were slightly shadowed by a gentle thoughtfulness. He moved close to her side with an irresistible impulse of tenderness, but she turned suddenly, and saying, "Come!" moved at a quicker pace down a narrow side path. Courtland followed. He had not gone far before he noticed that the graves seemed to fall into regular lines, the emblems became cheaper and more common; wooden head and foot stones of one monotonous pattern took the place of carved freestone or marble, and he knew that they had reached that part of the cemetery reserved for those who had fallen in the war. The long lines drawn with military precision stretched through the little valley, and again up the opposite hill in an odd semblance of hollow squares, ranks, and columns. A vague recollection of the fateful slope of Snake River came over him. It was intensified as Miss Sally, who was still preceding him, suddenly stopped before an isolated mound bearing a broken marble shaft and a pedestal with the inscription, "Chester Brooks." A few withered garlands

and immortelles were lying at its base, but encircling the broken shaft was a perfectly fresh, unfaded wreath.

"You never told me he was buried here!" said Courtland quickly, half shocked at the unexpected revelation. "Was he from this State?"

"No, but his regiment was," said Miss Sally, eying the wreath critically.

"And this wreath, is it from you?" continued Courtland gently.

"Yes, I thought yo' 'd like to see something fresh and pooty, instead of those stale ones."

"And were they also from you?" he asked even more gently.

"Dear no! They were left over from last anniversary day by some of the veterans. That 's the only one I put there — that is — I got Mr. Champney to leave it here on his way to his house. He lives just yonder, yo' know."

It was impossible to resist this invincible *naïveté*. Courtland bit his lip as the vision arose before him of this still more *naïf* English admirer bringing hither, at Miss Sally's bidding, the tribute which she wished to place on the grave of an old lover to please a *third* man. Meantime, she had put her two little hands behind her back in the simulated attitude of "a good girl," and was saying half smilingly, and he even thought half wistfully: —

"Are yo' satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let 's go away. It 's mighty hot here."

They turned away, and descending the slope again re-entered the thicker shade of the main avenue. Here they seemed to have left the sterner aspect of Death. They walked slowly; the air was heavy with the hot incense of flowers; the road sinking a little left a grassy bank on one side. Here Miss Sally halted and listlessly seated herself, motioning Courtland to do the same. He obeyed eagerly.

The incident of the wreath had troubled him, albeit with contending sensations. She had given it to please *him;* why should *he* question the manner, or torment himself with any retrospective thought? He would have given worlds to have been able to accept it lightly or gallantly, — with any other girl he could; but he knew he was trembling on the verge of a passionate declaration; the magnitude of the stake was too great to be imperiled by a levity of which she was more a mistress than himself, and he knew that his sentiment had failed to impress her. His pride kept him from appealing to her strangely practical nature, although he had recognized and accepted it, and had even begun to believe it an essential part of the strong fascination she had over him. But being neither a coward nor a weak, hesitating idealist, when he deliberately took his seat beside her he as deliberately made up his mind to accept his fate, whatever it might be, then and there.

Perhaps there was something of this in his face. "I thought yo' were looking a little white, co'nnle," she said quietly, "and I reckoned we might sit down a spell, and then take it slowly home. Yo' ain't accustomed to the So'th'n sun, and the air in the hollow *was* swampy." As he made a slight gesture of denial, she went on with a pretty sisterly superiority: "That 's the way of yo' No'th'n men. Yo' think yo' can do everything just as if yo' were reared to it, and yo' never make allowance for different climates, different blood, and different customs. That 's where yo' slip up."

But he was already leaning towards her with his dark earnest eyes fixed upon her in a way she could no longer mistake. "At the risk of slipping up again, Miss Dows," he said gently, dropping into her dialect with utterly unconscious flattery, "I am going to ask you to teach me everything *you* wish, to be all that *you* demand — which would be far better. You have said we were good friends;

I want you to let me hope to be more. I want you to overlook my deficiencies and the differences of my race and let me meet you on the only level where I can claim to be the equal of your own people — that of loving you. Give me only the same chance you gave the other poor fellow who sleeps yonder — the same chance you gave the luckier man who carried the wreath for you to put upon his grave."

She had listened with delicately knitted brows, the faintest touch of color, and a half-laughing, half-superior disapprobation. When he had finished, she uttered a plaintive little sigh. "Yo' ought n't to have said that, co'nnle, but yo' and me are too good friends to let even *that* stand between us. And to prove it to yo' I 'm going to forget it right away — and so are yo'."

"But I cannot," he said quickly; "if I could I should be unworthy of even your friendship. If you must reject it, do not make me feel the shame of thinking you believe me capable of wanton trifling. I know that this avowal is abrupt to you, but it is not to me. You have known me only for three months, but these three months have been to me the realization of three years' dreaming!" As she remained looking at him with bright, curious eyes, but still shaking her fair head distressedly, he moved nearer and caught her hand in the little pale lilac thread glove that was, nevertheless, too wide for her small fingers, and said appealingly: "But why should *you* forget it? Why must it be a forbidden topic? What is the barrier? Are you no longer free? Speak, Miss Dows — give me some hope. Miss Dows! — Sally!"

She had drawn herself away, distressed, protesting, her fair head turned aside, until with a slight twist and narrowing of her hand she succeeded in slipping it from the glove which she left a prisoner in his eager clasp. "There! Yo' can keep the glove, co'nnle," she said, breathing

quickly. "Sit down! This is not the place nor the weather for husking frolics! Well! — yo' want to know *why* yo' must n't speak to me in that way. Be still, and I 'll tell yo'."

She smoothed down the folds of her frock, sitting sideways on the bank, one little foot touching the road. "Yo' must n't speak that way to me," she went on slowly, "because it 's as much as yo' company 's wo'th, as much as *our* property 's wo'th, as much maybe as yo' life 's wo'th! Don't lift yo' comb, co'nnle; if you don't care for *that*, others may. Sit still, I tell yo'! Well, yo' come here from the No'th to run this property for money — that 's square and fair business; *that* any fool here can understand — it 's No'th'n style; it don't interfere with these fools' family affairs; it don't bring into their blood any No'th'n taint; it don't divide their clannishness; it don't separate father and son, sister and brother; and even if yo' got a foothold here and settled down, they know they can always outvote yo' five to one! But let these same fools know that yo' 're courtin' a So'th'n girl known to be 'Union' during the wah, that girl who has laughed at their foolishness; let them even *think* that he wants that girl to mix up the family and the race and the property for him, and there ain't a young or old fool that believes in So'th'n isolation as the price of So'th'n salvation that would n't rise against yo'! There is n't one that would n't make shipwreck of yo'r syndicate and yo'r capital and the prosperity of Redlands for the next four years to come, and think they were doing right! They began to suspect yo' from the first! They suspected yo' when yo' never went anywhere, but stuck close to the fahm and me. That 's why I wanted yo' to show yourself among the girls; they would n't have minded yo' flirting with them with the chance of yo' breaking yo' heart over Tave Reed or Lympy Morris! They 're fools enough to believe that a snub or

a jilt from a So'th'n girl would pay them back for a lost battle or a ruined plantation!"

For the first time Miss Sally saw Courtland's calm blood fly to his cheek and kindle in his eye. "You surely do not expect *me* to tolerate this blind and insolent interference!" he said, rising to his feet.

She lifted her ungloved hand in deprecation. "Sit still, co'nnle. Yo' 've been a soldier, and yo' know what duty is. Well! what 's yo' duty to yo' company?"

"It neither includes my private affairs nor regulates the beating of my heart. I will resign."

"And leave me and Aunt Miranda and the plantation?"

"No! The company will find another superintendent to look after your aunt's affairs and carry out our plans. And you, Sally — you will let me find you a home and fortune North? There is work for me there; there is room for you among my people."

She shook her head slowly with a sweet but superior smile. "No, co'nnle! I did n't believe in the wah, but the least I could do was to stand by my folks and share the punishment that I knew was coming from it. I despise this foolishness as much as yo', but I can't run away from it. Come, co'nnle, I won't ask yo' to forget this; mo', I 'll even believe yo' *meant* it, but yo' 'll promise me yo' won't speak of it again as long as yo' are with the company and Aunt Miranda and me! There must n't be more — there must n't even *seem* to be more — between us."

"But then I may hope?" he said, eagerly grasping her hand.

"I promise nothing, for yo' must not even have *that* excuse for speaking of this again, either from anything I do or may seem to do." She stopped, released her hand, as her eyes were suddenly fixed on the distance. Then she said with a slight smile, but without the least embarrassment or impatience: —

"There 's Mr. Champney coming here now. I reckon he 's looking to see if that wreath is safe."

Courtland looked up quickly. He could see the straw hat of the young Englishman just above the myrtle bushes in a path intersecting the avenue. A faint shadow crossed his face. "Let me know one thing more," he said hurriedly. "I know I have no right to ask the question, but has — has — has Mr. Champney anything to do with your decision ? "

She smiled brightly. "Yo' asked just now if yo' could have the same chance he and Chet Brooks had. Well, poor Chet is dead, and Mr. Champney — well ! — wait and see." She lifted her voice and called, "Mr. Champney ! " The young fellow came briskly towards them; his face betrayed a slight surprise, but no discomfiture, as he recognized her companion.

"Oh, Mr. Champney," said Miss Sally plaintively, "I 've lost my glove somewhere near pooah Brooks's tomb in the hollow. Won't you go and fetch it, and come back here to take me home ? The co'nnle has got to go and see his sick niggers in the hospital." Champney lifted his hat, nodded genially to Courtland, and disappeared below the cypresses on the slope. "Yo' must n't be mad," she said, turning in explanation to her companion, "but we have been here too long already, and it 's better that I should be seen coming home with him than yo'."

"Then this sectional interference does not touch him ? " said Courtland bitterly.

"No. He 's an Englishman ; his father was a known friend of the Confederacy, and bought their cotton bonds."

She stopped, gazing into Courtland's face with a pretty vague impatience and a slight pouting of her lip.

"Co'nnle ! "

"Miss Sally."

"Yo' say yo' had known me for three years before yo'

saw me. Well, we met once before we ever spoke to each other!"

Courtland looked in her laughing eyes with admiring wonder. "When?" he asked.

"The first day yo' came! Yo' moved the ladder when I was on the cornice, and I walked all over yo' head. And, like a gentleman, yo' never said a word about it. I reckon I stood on yo' head for five minutes."

"Not as long as that," said Courtland laughing, "if I remember rightly."

"Yes," said Miss Sally, with dancing eyes. "I, a So'th'n girl, actually set my foot on the head of a No'th'n scum of a co'nnle! My!"

"Let that satisfy your friends, then."

"No! *I* want to apologize. Sit down, co'nnle."

"But, Miss Sally" —

"Sit down, quick!"

He did so, seating himself sideways on the bank. Miss Sally stood beside him.

"Take off yo' hat, sir."

He obeyed smilingly. Miss Sally suddenly slipped behind him. He felt the soft touch of her small hands on his shoulders; warm breath stirred the roots of his hair, and then — the light pressure on his scalp of what seemed the lips of a child.

He leaped to his feet, yet before he could turn completely round — a difficulty the young lady had evidently calculated upon — he was too late! The floating draperies of the artful and shameless Miss Sally were already disappearing among the tombs in the direction of the hollow.

CHAPTER V

The house occupied by the manager of the Drummond Syndicate in Redlands — the former residence of a local lawyer and justice of the peace — was not large, but had an imposing portico of wooden Doric columns, which extended to the roof and fronted the main street. The all-pervading creeper closely covered it; the sidewalk before it was shaded by a row of broad-leaved ailantus. The front room, with French windows opening on the portico, was used by Colonel Courtland as a general office; beyond this a sitting-room and dining-room overlooked the old-fashioned garden with its detached kitchen and inevitable negro cabin. It was a close evening; there were dark clouds coming up in the direction of the turnpike road, but the leaves of the ailantus hung heavy and motionless in the hush of an impending storm. The sparks of lazily floating fireflies softly expanded and went out in the gloom of the black foliage, or in the dark recesses of the office, whose windows were widely open, and whose lights Courtland had extinguished when he brought his armchair to the portico for coolness. One of these sparks beyond the fence, although alternately glowing and paling, was still so persistent and stationary that Courtland leaned forward to watch it more closely, at which it disappeared, and a voice from the street said: —

"Is that you, Courtland?"

"Yes. Come in, won't you?"

The voice was Champney's, and the light was from his cigar. As he opened the gate and came slowly up the steps

of the portico the usual hesitation of his manner seemed to have increased. A long sigh trilled the limp leaves of the ailantus and as quickly subsided. A few heavy perpendicular raindrops crashed and spattered through the foliage like molten lead.

"You've just escaped the shower," said Courtland pleasantly. He had not seen Champney since they parted in the cemetery six weeks before.

"Yes! — I — I thought I'd like to have a little talk with you, Courtland," said Champney. He hesitated a moment before the proffered chair, and then added, with a cautious glance towards the street, "Had n't we better go inside?"

"As you like. But you'll find it wofully hot. We're quite alone here; there's nobody in the house, and this shower will drive any loungers from the street." He was quite frank, although their relations to each other in regard to Miss Sally were still so undefined as to scarcely invite his confidence.

Howbeit Champney took the proffered chair and the glass of julep which Courtland brought him.

"You remember my speaking to you of Dumont?" he said hesitatingly, "Miss Dows' French cousin, you know? Well — he's coming here: he's got property here — those three houses opposite the Court House. From what I hear, he's come over with a lot of new-fangled French ideas on the nigger question — rot about equality and fraternity, don't you know — and the highest education and highest offices for them. You know what the feeling is here already? You know what happened at the last election at Coolidgeville — how the whites would n't let the niggers go to the polls and the jolly row that was kicked up over it? Well, it looks as if that sort of thing might happen *here*, don't you know, if Miss Dows takes up these ideas."

"But I 've reason to suppose — I mean," said Courtland, correcting himself with some deliberation, "that any one who knows Miss Dows' opinions knows that these are not her views. Why should she take them up?"

"Because she takes *him* up," returned Champney hurriedly; "and even if she did n't believe in them herself, she 'd have to share the responsibility with him in the eyes of every unreconstructed rowdy like Tom Higbee and the rest of them. They 'd make short work of her niggers all the same."

"But I don't see why she should be made responsible for the opinions of her cousin, nor do I exactly know what 'taking him up' means," returned Courtland quietly.

Champney moistened his dry lips with the julep and uttered a nervous laugh. "Suppose we say her husband — for that 's what his coming back here means. Everybody knows that; you would, too, if you ever talked with her about anything but business."

A bright flash of lightning that lit up the faces of the two men would have revealed Champney's flushed features and Courtland's lack of color had they been looking at each other. But they were not, and the long reverberating crash of thunder which followed prevented any audible reply from Courtland, and covered his agitation.

For without fully accepting Champney's conclusions he was cruelly shocked at the young man's utterance of them. He had scrupulously respected the wishes of Miss Sally, and had faithfully — although never hopelessly — held back any expression of his own love since their conversation in the cemetery. But while his native truthfulness and sense of honor had overlooked the seeming insincerity of her attitude towards Champney, he had never justified his own tacit participation in it, and the concealment of his own pretensions before his possible rival. It was true that she had forbidden him to openly enter the lists with her

admirers, but Champney's innocent assumption of his indifference to her and his consequent half confidences added poignancy to his story. There seemed to be only one way to extricate himself, and that was by a quarrel. Whether he did or did not believe Champney's story, whether it was only the jealous exaggeration of a rival, or Miss Sally was actually deceiving them both, his position had become intolerable.

"I must remind you, Champney," he said, with freezing deliberation, "that Miss Miranda Dows and her niece now represent the Drummond Company equally with myself, and that you cannot expect me to listen to any reflections upon the way they choose to administer their part in its affairs, either now, or to come. Still less do I care to discuss the idle gossip which can affect only the *private* interests of these ladies, with which neither you nor I have any right to interfere."

But the *naïveté* of the young Englishman was as invincible as Miss Sally's own, and as fatal to Courtland's attitude. "Of course I haven't any *right*, you know," he said, calmly ignoring the severe preamble of his companion's speech, "but I say! hang it all! even if a fellow has no chance *himself*, he don't like to see a girl throw herself and her property away on a man like that."

"One moment, Champney," said Courtland, under the infection of his guest's simplicity, abandoning his former superior attitude. "You say you have no chance. Do you want me to understand that you are regularly a suitor of Miss Dows?"

"Y-e-e-s," said the young fellow, but with the hesitation of conscientiousness rather than evasion. "That is — you know I *was*. But don't you see, it couldn't be. It wouldn't do, you know. If those clannish neighbors of hers — that Southern set — suspected that Miss Sally was courted by an Englishman, don't you know — a poacher on

their preserves — it would be all up with her position on the property and her influence over them. I don't mind telling you that 's one reason why I left the company and took that other plantation. But even that did n't work; they had their suspicions excited already."

"Did Miss Dows give that as a reason for declining your suit?" asked Courtland slowly.

"Yes. You know what a straightforward girl she is. She did n't come no rot about 'not expecting anything of the kind,' or about 'being a sister to me,' and all that, for, by Jove! she 's always more like a fellow's sister, don't you know, than his girl. Of course, it was hard lines for me, but I suppose she was about right." He stopped, and then added, with a kind of gentle persistency: "*You* think she was about right, don't you?"

With what was passing in Courtland's mind the question seemed so bitterly ironical that at first he leaned half angrily forward, in an unconscious attempt to catch the speaker's expression in the darkness. "I should hardly venture to give an opinion," he said, after a pause. "Miss Dows' relations with her neighbors are so very peculiar. And from what you tell me of her cousin it would seem that her desire to placate them is not always to be depended upon."

"I 'm not finding fault with *her*, you know," said Champney hastily. "I 'm not such a beastly cad as that; I would n't have spoken of my affairs at all, but you asked, you know. I only thought, if she was going to get herself into trouble on account of that Frenchman, you might talk to her — she 'd listen to you, because she 'd know you only did it out of business reasons. And they 're really business reasons, you know. I suppose you don't think much of my business capacity, colonel, and you would n't go much on my judgment — especially now; but I 've been here longer than you and" — he lowered his voice slightly and

dragged his chair nearer Courtland — "I don't like the looks of things here. There 's some devilment plotting among those rascals. They 're only awaiting an opportunity ; a single flash would be enough to set them in a blaze, even if the fire was n't lit and smouldering already like a spark in a bale of cotton. I 'd cut the whole thing and clear out if I did n't think it would make it harder for Miss Dows, who would be left alone."

"You 're a good fellow, Champney," said Courtland, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder with a sudden impulse, "and I forgive you for overlooking any concern that *I* might have. Indeed," he added, with an odd seriousness and a half sigh, "it 's not strange that you should. But I must remind you that the Dowses are strictly the agents and tenants of the company I represent, and that their rights and property under that tenancy shall not be interfered with by others as long as I am here. I have no right, however," he added gravely, "to keep Miss Dows from imperiling them by her social relations."

Champney rose and shook hands with him awkwardly. "The shower seems to be holding up," he said, "and I 'll toddle along before it starts afresh. Good-night ! I say — you did n't mind my coming to you this way, did you ? By Jove ! I thought you were a little stand-offish at first. But you know what I meant ? "

"Perfectly, and I thank you." They shook hands again. Champney stepped from the portico, and, reaching the gate, seemed to vanish as he had come, out of the darkness.

The storm was not yet over ; the air had again become close and suffocating. Courtland remained brooding in his chair. Whether he could accept Champney's news as true or not, he felt that he must end this suspense at once. A half-guilty consciousness that he was thinking more of it in reference to his own passion than his duty to the company did not render his meditations less unpleasant. Yet while

he could not reconcile Miss Sally's confidences in the cemetery concerning the indifference of her people to Champney's attentions with what Champney had just told him of the reasons she had given *him* for declining them, I am afraid he was not shocked by her peculiar ethics. A lover seldom finds fault with his mistress for deceiving his rival, and is as little apt to consider the logical deduction that she could deceive him also, as Othello was to accept Brabantio's warning. The masculine sense of honor which might have resented the friendship of a man capable of such treachery did not hesitate to accept the love of a woman under the same conditions. Perhaps there was an implied compliment in thus allowing her to take the sole ethical responsibility, which few women would resist.

In the midst of this gloomy abstraction Courtland suddenly raised his head and listened.

"Cato."

"Yes, sah."

There was a sound of heavy footsteps in the hall coming from the rear of the house, and presently a darker bulk appeared in the shadowed doorway. It was his principal overseer — a strong and superior negro, selected by his fellow freedmen from among their number in accordance with Courtland's new régime.

"Did you come here from the plantation or the town?"

"The town, sah."

"I think you had better keep out of the town in the evenings for the present," said Courtland in a tone of quiet but positive authority.

"Are dey goin' to bring back de old 'patter rollers,'[1] sah?" asked the man, with a slight sneer.

"I don't know," returned Courtland calmly, ignoring his overseer's manner. "But if they did you must comply with

[1] The "patrol" or local police who formerly had the surveillance of slaves.

the local regulations unless they conflict with the Federal laws, when you must appeal to the Federal authorities. I prefer you should avoid any trouble until you are sure."

"I reckon they won't try any games on me," said the negro, with a short laugh.

Courtland looked at him intently.

"I thought as much! You 're carrying arms, Cato! Hand them over."

The overseer hesitated for a moment, and then unstrapped a revolver from his belt, and handed it to Courtland.

"Now how many of you are in the habit of going round the town armed like this?"

"Only de men who 've been insulted, sah."

"And how have *you* been insulted?"

"Marse Tom Higbee down in de market reckoned it was high time fancy niggers was drov into de swamp, and I allowed that loafers and beggars had better roost high when workin' folks was around, and Marse Tom said he 'd cut my haht out."

"And do you think your carrying a revolver will prevent him and his friends performing that operation if you provoked them?"

"You said we was to pertect ourse'fs, sah," returned the negro gloomily. "What foh den did you drill us to use dem rifles in de armory?"

"To defend yourselves *together* under orders if attacked, not to singly threaten with them in a street row. Together, you would stand some chance against those men; separately they could eat you up, Cato."

"I would n't trust too much to some of dem niggers standing together, sah," said Cato darkly. "Dey 'd run before de old masters — if dey did n't run to 'em. ' Shuah!"

A fear of this kind had crossed Courtland's mind before, but he made no present comment. "I found two of the armory rifles in the men's cabins yesterday," he resumed

quietly. "See that it does not occur again! They must not be taken from the armory except to defend it."

"Yes, sah."

There was a moment of silence. Then it was broken by a sudden gust that swept through the columns of the portico, stirring the vines. The broad leaves of the ailantus began to rustle; an ominous pattering followed; the rain had recommenced. And as Courtland rose and walked towards the open window its blank panes and the interior of the office were suddenly illuminated by a gleam of returning lightning.

He entered the office, bidding Cato follow, and lit the lamp above his desk. The negro remained standing gloomily but respectfully by the window.

"Cato, do you know anything of Mr. Dumont — Miss Dows' cousin?"

The negro's white teeth suddenly flashed in the lamplight. "Ya! ha! I reckon, sah."

"Then he 's a great friend of your people?"

"I don't know about dat, sah. But he 's a pow'ful enemy of de Reeds and de Higbees!"

"On account of his views, of course?"

"'Deed no!" said Cato, with an astounded air. "Jess on account of de vendetta!"

"The vendetta?"

"Yes, sah. De old blood quo'll of de families. It 's been goin' on over fifty years, sah. De granfader, fader, and brudder of de Higbees was killed by de granfader, fader, and brudder of de Doomonts. De Reeds chipped in when all de Higbees was played out, fo' dey was relations, but dey was chawed up by some of de Dowses, first cousins to de Doomonts."

"What? Are the Dows in this vendetta?"

"No, sah. No mo'. Dey 's bin no man in de family since Miss Sally's fader died — dat 's let de Dows out fo'-

ever. De las' shootin' was done by Marse Jack Doomont, who crippled Marse Tom Higbee's brudder Jo, and den skipped to Europe. Dey say he 's come back, and is lying low over at Atlanty. Dar 'll be lively times ef he comes here to see Miss Sally."

"But he may have changed his ideas while living abroad where this sort of thing is simple murder."

The negro shook his head grimly. "Den he would n't come, sah. No, sah. He knows dat Tom Higbee 's bound to go fo' him or leave de place, and Marse Jack would n't mind settlin' *him* too as well as his brudder, for de scores is agin de Doomonts yet. And Marse Jack ain't no slouch wid a scatter gun."

At any other time the imminence of this survival of a lawless barbarism of which he had heard so much would have impressed Courtland; now he was only interested in it on account of the inconceivable position in which it left Miss Sally. Had she anything to do with this baleful cousin's return, or was she only to be a helpless victim of it?

A white, dazzling, and bewildering flash of lightning suddenly lit up the room, the porch, the dripping ailantus, and the flooded street beyond. It was followed presently by a crash of thunder, with what seemed to be a second fainter flash of lightning, or rather as if the first flash had suddenly ignited some inflammable substance. With the long reverberation of the thunder still shaking the house, Courtland slipped quickly out of the window and passed down to the gate.

"Did it strike anything, sah?" said the startled negro, as Courtland returned.

"Not that I can see," said his employer shortly. "Go inside, and call Zoë and her daughter from the cabin and bring them in the hall. Stay till I come. Go! — I'll shut the windows myself."

"It must have struck somewhere, sah, shuah! Deh 's a pow'ful smell of sulphur right here," said the negro as he left the room.

Courtland thought so too, but it was a kind of sulphur that he had smelled before — on the battlefield! For when the door was closed behind his overseer he took the lamp to the opposite wall and examined it carefully. There was the distinct hole made by a bullet which had missed Cato's head at the open window by an inch.

CHAPTER VI

In an instant Courtland had regained complete possession of himself. His distracting passion — how distracting he had never before realized — was gone! His clear sight — no longer distorted by sentiment — had come back; he saw everything in its just proportion — his duty, the plantation, the helpless freedman threatened by lawless fury; the two women — no longer his one tantalizing vision, but now only a passing detail of the work before him. He saw them through no aberrating mist of tenderness or expediency — but with the single directness of the man of action.

The shot had clearly been intended for Cato. Even if it were an act of mere personal revenge, it showed a confidence and security in the would-be assassin that betokened coöperation and an organized plan. He had availed himself of the thunder-storm, the flash and long reverberating roll of sound — an artifice not unknown to border ambush — to confuse discovery at the instant. Yet the attack might be only an isolated one; or it might be the beginning of a general raid upon the syndicate's freedmen. If the former he could protect Cato from its repetition by guarding him in the office until he could be conveyed to a place of safety; if the latter, he must at once collect the negroes at their quarters, and take Cato with him. He resolved upon the latter course. The quarters were half a mile from the Dows' dwelling — which was two miles away.

He sat down and wrote a few lines to Miss Dows, stating that, in view of some threatened disturbances in the town,

he thought it advisable to keep the negroes in their quarters, whither he was himself going. He sent her his housekeeper and the child, as they had both better remain in a place of security until he returned to town. He gave the note to Zoë, bidding her hasten by the back garden across the fields. Then he turned to Cato.

"I am going with you to the quarters to-night," he said quietly, "and you can carry your pistol back to the armory yourself." He handed him the weapon. The negro received it gratefully, but suddenly cast a searching glance at his employer. Courtland's face, however, betrayed no change. When Zoë had gone, he continued tranquilly, "We will go by the back way through the woods." As the negro started slightly, Courtland continued in the same even tone: "The sulphur you smelled just now, Cato, was the smoke of a gun fired at *you* from the street. I don't propose that the shot shall be repeated under the same advantages."

The negro became violently agitated. "It was dat sneakin' hound, Tom Higbee," he said huskily.

Courtland looked at him sharply. "Then there was something more than *words* passed between him and you, Cato. What happened? Come, speak out!"

"He lashed me with his whip, and I gib him one right under the yeah, and drupped him," said Cato, recovering his courage with his anger at the recollection. "I had a right to defend myse'f, sah."

"Yes, and I hope you 'll be able to do it, now," said Courtland calmly, his face giving no sign of his conviction that Cato's fate was doomed by that single retaliating blow, "but you 'll be safer at the quarters." He passed into his bedroom, took a revolver from his bedhead and a derringer from the drawer, both of which he quickly slipped beneath his buttoned coat, and returned.

"When we are in the fields, clear of the house, keep

close by my side, and even try to keep step with me. What you have to say, say *now;* there must be no talking to betray our position — we must go silently, and you 'll have enough to do to exercise your eyes and ears. I shall stand between you and any attack, but I expect you to obey orders without hesitation." He opened the back door, motioned to Cato to pass out, followed him, locked the door behind them, and taking the negro's arm walked beside the low palings to the end of the garden, where they climbed the fence and stood upon the open field beyond.

Unfortunately, it had grown lighter with the breaking of the heavy clouds, and gusty gleams of moonlight chased each other over the field, or struck a glitter from standing rain-pools between the little hillocks. To cross the open field and gain the fringe of woods on the other side was the nearest way to the quarters, but for the moment was the most exposed course; to follow the hedge to the bottom of the field and the boundary fence and then cross at right angles, in its shadow, would be safer, but they would lose valuable time. Believing that Cato's vengeful assailant was still hovering near with his comrades, Courtland cast a quick glance down the shadowy line of osage hedge behind them. Suddenly Cato grasped his arm and pointed in the same direction, where the boundary fence he had noticed — a barrier of rough palings — crossed the field. With the moon low on the other side of it, it was a mere black silhouette, broken only by bright silver openings and gaps along its surface that indicated the moonlit field beyond. At first Courtland saw nothing else. Then he was struck by the fact that these openings became successively and regularly eclipsed, as with the passing of some opaque object behind them. It was a file of men on the other side of the fence, keeping in its shelter as they crossed the field towards his house. Roughly calculating from the passing obscurations, there must have been twelve or fifteen in all.

He could no longer doubt their combined intentions, nor hesitate how to meet them. He must at once make for the quarters with Cato, even if he had to cross that open field before them. He knew that they would avoid injuring him personally, in the fear of possible Federal and political complications, and he resolved to use that fear to insure Cato's safety. Placing his hands on the negro's shoulders, he shoved him forwards, falling into a "lock step" so close behind him that it became impossible for the most expert marksman to fire at one without imperiling the other's life. When halfway across the field he noticed that the shadows seen through the openings of the fence had paused. The ambushed men had evidently seen the double apparition, understood it, and, as he expected, dared not fire. He reached the other side with Cato in safety, but not before he saw the fateful shadows again moving, and this time in their own direction. They were evidently intending to pursue them. But once within the woods Courtland knew that his chances were equal. He breathed more freely. Cato, now less agitated, had even regained something of his former emotional combativeness which Courtland had checked. Although far from confident of his henchman's prowess in an emergency, the prospect of getting him safe into the quarters seemed brighter.

It was necessary, also, to trust to his superior woodcraft and knowledge of the locality, and Courtland still walking between him and his pursuers and covering his retreat allowed him to lead the way. It lay over ground that was beginning to slope gently; the underbrush was presently exchanged for springy moss, the character of the trees changed, the black trunks of cypresses made the gloom thicker. Trailing vines and parasites brushed their faces, a current of damp air seemed to flow just above the soil in which their lower limbs moved sluggishly as through stagnant water. As yet there was no indication of pursuit.

But Courtland felt that it was not abandoned. Indeed, he had barely time to check an exclamation from the negro, before the dull gallop of horse-hoofs in the open ahead of them was plain to them both. It was a second party of their pursuers, mounted, who had evidently been sent to prevent final egress from the woods, while those they had just evaded were no doubt slowly and silently following them on foot. They were to be caught between two fires!

"What is there to the left of us?" whispered Courtland quickly.

"De swamp."

Courtland set his teeth together. His dull-witted companion had evidently walked them both into the trap! Nevertheless, his resolve was quickly made. He could already see through the thinning fringe of timber the figures of the mounted men in the moonlight.

"This should be the boundary line of the plantation? This field beside us is ours?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," returned the negro, "but de quarters is a mile furder."

"Good! Stay here until I come back or call you; I 'm going to talk to these fellows. But if you value your life, don't *you* speak nor stir."

He strode quickly through the intervening trees and stepped out into the moonlight. A suppressed shout greeted him, and half a dozen mounted men, masked and carrying rifles, rode down towards him, but he remained quietly waiting there, and as the nearest approached him, he made a step forward and cried, "Halt!"

The men pulled up sharply and mechanically at that ring of military imperiousness.

"What are you doing here?" said Courtland.

"We reckon that 's *our* business, co'nnle."

"It 's *mine*, when you 're on property that I control."

The man hesitated and looked interrogatively towards his

fellows. "I allow you 've got us there, co'nnle," he said at last, with the lazy insolence of conscious power, "but I don't mind telling you we 're wanting a nigger about the size of your Cato. We hain't got anything agin *you*, co'nnle; we don't want to interfere with *your* property, and *your* ways, but we don't calculate to have strangers interfere with *our* ways and *our* customs. Trot out your nigger — you No'th'n folks don't call *him* 'property,' you know — and we 'll clear off your land."

"And may I ask what you want of Cato?" said Courtland quietly.

"To show him that all the Federal law in h—ll won't protect him when he strikes a white man!" burst out one of the masked figures, riding forward.

"Then you compel me to show *you*," said Courtland immovably, "what any Federal citizen may do in the defense of Federal law. For I 'll kill the first man that attempts to lay hands upon him on my property. Some of you, who have already tried to assassinate him in cold blood, I have met before in less dishonorable warfare than this, and *they* know I am able to keep my word."

There was a moment's silence; the barrel of the revolver he was holding at his side glistened for an instant in the moonlight, but he did not move. The two men rode up to the first speaker and exchanged words. A light laugh followed, and the first speaker turned again to Courtland with a mocking politeness.

"Very well, co'nnle, if that 's your opinion, and you allow we can't follow our game over your property, why we reckon we 'll have to give way *to those who can*. Sorry to have troubled *you*. Good-night."

He lifted his hat ironically, waved it to his followers, and the next moment the whole party were galloping furiously towards the highroad.

For the first time that evening a nervous sense of appre-

hension passed over Courtland. The impending of some unknown danger is always more terrible to a brave man than the most overwhelming odds that he can see and realize. He felt instinctively that they had uttered no vague bravado to cover up their defeat; there was still some advantage on which they confidently reckoned — but what? Was it only a reference to the other party tracking them through the woods on which their enemies now solely relied? He regained Cato quickly; the white teeth of the foolishly confident negro were already flashing his imagined triumph to his employer. Courtland's heart grew sick as he saw it.

"We 're not out of the woods yet, Cato," he said dryly; "nor are they. Keep your eyes and ears open, and attend to me. How long can we keep in the cover of these woods, and still push on in the direction of the quarters?"

"There 's a way roun' de edge o' de swamp, sah, but we 'd have to go back a spell to find it."

"Go on!"

"And dar 's moccasins and copperheads lying round here in de trail! Dey don't go for *us* ginerally — but," he hesitated, "white men don't stand much show."

"Good! Then it is as bad for those who are chasing us as for me. That will do. Lead on."

They retraced their steps cautiously, until the negro turned into a lighter byway. A strange mephitic odor seemed to come from sodden leaves and mosses that began to ooze under their feet. They had picked their way in silence for some minutes; the stunted willows and cypress standing farther and farther apart, and the openings with clumps of sedge were frequent. Courtland was beginning to fear this exposure of his follower, and had moved up beside him, when suddenly the negro caught his arm, and trembled violently. His lips were parted over his teeth, the whites of his eyes glistened, he seemed gasping and speechless with fear.

"What 's the matter, Cato?" said Courtland, glancing instinctively at the ground beneath. "Speak, man! — have you been bitten?"

The word seemed to wring an agonized cry from the miserable man.

"Bitten! No; but don't you hear 'em coming, sah! God Almighty! don't you hear dat?"

"What?"

"De dogs! de houns! — *de bloodhouns!* Dey 've set 'em loose on me!"

It was true! A faint baying in the distance was now distinctly audible to Courtland. He knew now plainly the full, cruel purport of the leader's speech, — those who could go anywhere were tracking their game!

Every trace of manhood had vanished from the negro's cowering frame. Courtland laid his hand assuringly, appealingly, and then savagely on his shoulder.

"Come! Enough of this! I am here, and will stand by you, whatever comes. These dogs are no more to be feared than the others. Rouse yourself, man, and at least help *me* make a fight of it."

"No! no!" screamed the terrified man. "Lemme go! Lemme go back to de Massas! Tell 'em I 'll come! Tell 'em to call de houns off me, and I 'll go quiet! Lemme go!" He struggled violently in his companion's grasp.

In all Courtland's self-control, habits of coolness, and discipline, it is to be feared there was still something of the old Berserker temper. His face was white, his eyes blazed in the darkness; only his voice kept that level distinctness which made it for a moment more terrible than even the baying of the tracking hounds to the negro's ear. "Cato," he said, "attempt to run now, and, by God! I 'll save the dogs the trouble of grappling your living carcass! Come here! Up that tree with you!" pointing to a swamp magnolia. "Don't move as long as I can stand

here, and when I'm down — but not till then — save yourself — the best you can."

He half helped, half dragged, the now passive African to the solitary tree; as the bay of a single hound came nearer, the negro convulsively scrambled from Courtland's knee and shoulder to the fork of branches a dozen feet from the ground. Courtland drew his revolver, and, stepping back a few yards into the open, awaited the attack.

It came unexpectedly from behind. A sudden yelp of panting cruelty and frenzied anticipation at Courtland's back caused him to change front quickly, and the dripping fangs and snaky boa-like neck of a gray weird shadow passed him. With an awful supernaturalness of instinct, it kept on in an unerring line to the fateful tree. But that dread directness of scent was Courtland's opportunity. His revolver flashed out in an aim as unerring. The brute, pierced through neck and brain, dashed on against the tree in his impetus, and then rolled over against it in a quivering bulk. Again another bay coming from the same direction told Courtland that his pursuers had outflanked him, and the whole pack were crossing the swamp. But he was prepared; again the same weird shadow, as spectral and monstrous as a dream, dashed out into the brief light of the open, but this time it was stopped, and rolled over convulsively before it had crossed. Flushed, with the fire of fight in his veins, Courtland turned almost furiously from the fallen brutes at his feet to meet the onset of the more cowardly hunters whom he knew were at his heels. At that moment it would have fared ill with the foremost. No longer the calculating steward and diplomatic manager, no longer the cool-headed arbiter of conflicting interests, he was ready to meet them, not only with the intrepid instincts of a soldier, but with an aroused partisan fury equal to their own. To his surprise no one followed; the baying of a third hound seemed to be silenced and checked;

the silence was broken only by the sound of distant disputing voices and the uneasy trampling of hoofs. This was followed by two or three rifle-shots in the distance, but not either in the direction of the quarters nor the Dows' dwelling-house. There evidently was some interruption in the pursuit, — a diversion of some kind had taken place, — but what he knew not. He could think of no one who might have interfered on his behalf, and the shouting and wrangling seemed to be carried on in the accents of the one sectional party. He called cautiously to Cato. The negro did not reply. He crossed to the tree and shook it impatiently. Its boughs were empty; Cato was gone! The miserable negro must have taken advantage of the first diversion in his favor to escape. But where, and how, there was nothing left to indicate.

As Courtland had taken little note of the trail, he had no idea of his own whereabouts. He knew he must return to the fringe of cypress to be able to cross the open field and gain the negro quarters, where it was still possible that Cato had fled. Taking a general direction from the few stars visible above the opening, he began to retrace his steps. But he had no longer the negro's woodcraft to guide him. At times his feet were caught in trailing vines which seemed to coil around his ankles with ominous suggestiveness; at times the yielding soil beneath his tread showed his perilous proximity to the swamp, as well as the fact that he was beginning to incline towards that dread circle which is the hopeless instinct of all lost and straying humanity. Luckily the edge of the swamp was more open, and he would be enabled to correct his changed course again by the position of the stars. But he was becoming chilled and exhausted by these fruitless efforts, and at length, after a more devious and prolonged détour, which brought him back to the swamp again, he resolved to skirt its edge in search of some other mode of issuance.

Beyond him, the light seemed stronger, as of a more extended opening or clearing, and there was even a superficial gleam from the end of the swamp itself, as if from some *ignis fatuus* or the glancing of a pool of unbroken water. A few rods farther brought him to it and a full view of the unencumbered expanse. Beyond him, far across the swamp, he could see a hillside bathed in the moonlight with symmetrical lines of small white squares dotting its slopes and stretching down into a valley of gleaming shafts, pyramids, and tombs. It was the cemetery; the white squares on the hillside were the soldiers' graves. And among them even at that distance, uplifting solemnly, like a reproachful phantom, was the broken shaft above the dust of Chester Brooks.

With the view of that fateful spot, which he had not seen since his last meeting there with Sally Dows, a flood of recollection rushed upon him. In the white mist that hung low along the farther edge of the swamp, he fancied he could see again the battery smoke through which the ghostly figure of the dead rider had charged his gun three years before; in the vapory white plumes of a funereal plant in the long avenue he was reminded of the light figure of Miss Sally as she appeared at their last meeting. In another moment, in his already dazed condition, he might have succumbed to some sensuous memory of her former fascinations, but he threw it off savagely now, with a quick and bitter recalling of her deceit and his own weakness. Turning his back upon the scene with a half-superstitious tremor, he plunged once more into the trackless covert. But he was conscious that his eyesight was gradually growing dim and his strength failing. He was obliged from time to time to stop and rally his sluggish senses, that seemed to grow heavier under some deadly exhalation that flowed around him. He even seemed to hear familiar voices, — but that must be delusion. At last he stumbled.

Throwing out an arm to protect himself, he came heavily down upon the ooze, striking a dull, half-elastic root that seemed — it must have been another delusion — to move beneath him, and even — so confused were his senses now — to strike back angrily upon his prostrate arm. A sharp pain ran from his elbow to shoulder and for a moment stung him to full consciousness again. There were voices surely, — the voices of their former pursuers! If they were seeking to revenge themselves upon him for Cato's escape, he was ready for them. He cocked his revolver and stood erect. A torch flashed through the wood. But even at that moment a film came over his eyes; he staggered and fell.

An interval of helpless semi-consciousness ensued. He felt himself lifted by strong arms and carried forward, his arm hanging uselessly at his side. The dank odor of the wood was presently exchanged for the free air of the open field; the flaming pine-knot torches were extinguished in the bright moonlight. People pressed around him, but so indistinctly he could not recognize them. All his consciousness seemed centred in the burning, throbbing pain of his arm. He felt himself laid upon the gravel; the sleeve cut from his shoulder, the cool sensation of the hot and bursting skin bared to the night air, and then a soft, cool, and indescribable pressure upon a wound he had not felt before. A voice followed, — high, lazily petulant, and familiar to him, and yet one he strove in vain to recall.

"De Lawdy-Gawd save us, Miss Sally! Wot yo' doin' dah? Chile! Chile! Yo' 'll kill yo'se'f, shuah!"

The pressure continued, strange and potent even through his pain, and was then withdrawn. And a voice that thrilled him said: —

"It 's the only thing to save him! Hush, ye chattering black crow! Say anything about this to a living soul, and I 'll have yo' flogged! Now trot out the whiskey bottle and pour it down him."

CHAPTER VII

When Courtland's eyes opened again, he was in bed in his own room at Redlands, with the vivid morning sun occasionally lighting up the wall whenever the closely drawn curtains were lightly blown aside by the freshening breeze. The whole events of the night might have been a dream but for the insupportable languor which numbed his senses, and the torpor of his arm, that, swollen and discolored, lay outside the coverlet on a pillow before him. Cloths that had been wrung out in iced water were replaced upon it from time to time by Sophy, Miss Dows' housekeeper, who, seated near his bedhead, was lazily fanning him. Their eyes met.

"Broken?" he said interrogatively, with a faint return of his old deliberate manner, glancing at his helpless arm.

"Deedy no, cunnle! Snake bite," responded the negress.

"Snake bite!" repeated Courtland, with languid interest, "what snake?"

"Moccasin o' copperhead — if you doun know yo'se'f which," she replied. "But it 's all right now, honey! De pizen 's drawed out and clean gone. Wot yer feels now is de whiskey. De whiskey *stays*, sah. It gets into de lubrications of de skin, sah, and has to be abso'bed."

Some faint chord of memory was touched by the girl's peculiar vocabulary.

"Ah," said Courtland quickly, "you 're Miss Dows' Sophy. Then you can tell me" —

"Nuffin, sah! absomlutely nuffin!" interrupted the

girl, shaking her head with impressive official dignity. "It 's done gone fo'bid by de doctor! Yo' 're to lie dar and shut yo' 're eye, honey," she added, for the moment reverting unconsciously to the native maternal tenderness of her race, "and yo' 're not to bodder yo'se'f ef school keeps o' not. De medical man say distinctly, sah," she concluded, sternly recalling her duty again, "no conversation wid de patient."

But Courtland had winning ways with all dependents. "But you will answer me *one* question, Sophy, and I 'll not ask another. Has" — he hesitated in his still uncertainty as to the actuality of his experience and its probable extent — "has — Cato — escaped?"

"If yo' mean dat sassy, bull-nigger oberseer of yo'se, cunnle, *he 's* safe, yo' bet!" returned Sophy sharply. "Safe in his own quo'tahs night afo' las', after braggin' about the bloodhaowns he killed; and safe ober the county line yes'day moan'in, after kicking up all dis rumpus. If dar is a sassy, highfalutin' nigger I jiss 'spises — its dat black nigger Cato o' yo'se! Now," — relenting, — "yo' jiss wink yo' eye, honey, and don't excite yo'se'f about sach black trash; drap off to sleep comfor'ble. Fo' you do'an get annuder word out o' Sophy, shuah!"

As if in obedience, Courtland closed his eyes. But even in his weak state he was conscious of the blood coming into his cheek at Sophy's relentless criticism of the man for whom he had just periled his life and position. Much of it he felt was true; but how far had he been a dupe in his quixotic defense of a quarrelsome blusterer and cowardly bully? Yet there was the unmistakable shot and cold-blooded attempt at Cato's assassination! And there were the bloodhounds sent to track the unfortunate man! That was no dream — but a brutal inexcusable fact!

The medical practitioner of Redlands he remembered was conservative, old-fashioned, and diplomatic. But his

sympathies had been broadened by some army experiences, and Courtland trusted to some soldierly and frank exposition of the matter from him. Nevertheless, Dr. Maynard was first healer, and, like Sophy professionally cautious. The colonel had better not talk about it now. It was already two days old; the colonel had been nearly forty-eight hours in bed. It was a regrettable affair, but the natural climax of long-continued political and racial irritation — and not without *great* provocation! Assassination was a strong word; could Colonel Courtland swear that Cato was actually *aimed at*, or was it not merely a demonstration to frighten a bullying negro? It might have been necessary to teach him a lesson — which the colonel by this time ought to know could only be taught to these inferior races by *fear*. The bloodhounds! Ah, yes! — well, the bloodhounds were, in fact, only a part of that wholesome discipline. Surely Colonel Courtland was not so foolish as to believe that, even in the old slave-holding days, planters sent dogs after runaways to mangle and destroy *their own property?* They might as well, at once, let them escape! No, sir! They were used only to frighten and drive the niggers out of swamps, brakes, and hiding-places — as no nigger had ever dared to face 'em. Cato might lie as much as he liked, but everybody knew *who* it was that killed Major Reed's hounds. Nobody blamed the colonel for it, — not even Major Reed, — but if the colonel had lived a little longer in the South, he 'd have known it was n't necessary to do that in self-preservation, as the hounds would never have gone for a white man. But that was not a matter for the colonel to bother about *now*. He was doing well; he had slept nearly thirty hours; there was no fever, he must continue to doze off the exhaustion of his powerful stimulant, and he, the doctor, would return later in the afternoon.

Perhaps it was his very inability to grasp in that ex-

hausted state the full comprehension of the doctor's meaning, perhaps because the physical benumbing of his brain was stronger than any mental excitement, but he slept again until the doctor reappeared. "You 're doing well enough now, colonel," said the physician, after a brief examination of his patient, "and I think we can afford to wake you up a bit, and even let you move your arm. You 're luckier than poor Tom Higbee, who won't be able to set his leg to the floor for three weeks to come. I have n't got all the buckshot out of it yet that Jack Dumont put there the other night."

Courtland started slightly. Jack Dumont! That was the name of Sally Dows' cousin of whom Champney had spoken! He had resolutely put aside from his returning memory the hazy recollection of the young girl's voice — the last thing he had heard that night — and the mystery that seemed to surround it. But there was no delusion in this cousin — his rival, and that of the equally deceived Champney. He controlled himself and repeated coldly: —

"Jack Dumont!"

"Yes. But of course you knew nothing of all that, while you were off in the swamp there. Yet, by Jingo! it was Dumont's shooting Higbee that helped *you* to get off your nigger a darned sight more than *your* killing the dogs."

"I don't understand," returned Courtland coldly.

"Well, you see, Dumont, who had taken up No'th'n principles, I reckon, more to goad the Higbees and please Sally Dows than from any conviction, came over here that night. Whether he suspected anything was up, or wanted to dare Higbee for bedevilment, or was only dancing attendance on Miss Sally, no one knows. But he rode slap into Higbee's party, called out, 'If you 're out hunting, Tom, here 's a chance for your score!' meaning their old vendetta feud, and brings his shot-gun up to his shoulder.

Higbee was n't quick enough, Dumont lets fly, drops Higbee, and then gallops off chased by the Reeds to avenge Higbee, and followed by the whole crowd to see the fun, which was a little better than nigger-driving. And that let you and Cato out, colonel."

"And Dumont?"

"Got clean away to Foxboro' Station, leaving another score on his side for the Reeds and Higbees to wipe out as best they can. You No'th'n men don't believe in these sort of things, colonel, but taken as a straight dash and bit o' raiding, that stroke of Sally Dows' cousin was mighty fine!"

Courtland controlled himself with difficulty. The doctor had spoken truly. The hero of this miserable affair was *her* cousin — *his rival!* And to him — perhaps influenced by some pitying appeal of Miss Sally for the man she had deceived — Courtland owed his life! He instinctively drew a quick, sharp breath.

"Are you in pain?"

"Not at all. When can I get up?"

"Perhaps to-morrow."

"And this arm?"

"Better not use it for a week or two." He stopped, and, glancing paternally at the younger man, added gravely but kindly: "If you 'll take my unprofessional advice, Colonel Courtland, you 'll let this matter simmer down. It won't hurt you and your affairs here that folks have had a taste of your quality, and the nigger a lesson that his fellows won't forget."

"I thank you," returned Courtland coldly; "but I think I already understand my duty to the company I represent and the Government I have served."

"Possibly, colonel," said the doctor quietly; "but you 'll let an older man remind you and the Government that you can't change the habits or relations of two distinct races in

a few years. Your friend, Miss Sally Dows — although not quite in my way of thinking — has never attempted *that*."

"I am fully aware that Miss Dows possesses diplomatic accomplishments and graces that I cannot lay claim to," returned Courtland bitterly.

The doctor lifted his eyebrows slightly and changed the subject.

When he had gone, Courtland called for writing materials. He had already made up his mind, and one course alone seemed proper to him. He wrote to the president of the company, detailing the circumstances that had just occurred, admitting the alleged provocation given by his overseer, but pointing out the terrorism of a mob-law which rendered his own discipline impossible. He asked that the matter be reported to Washington, and some measures taken for the protection of the freedmen. In the mean time he begged to tender his own resignation, but he would stay until his successor was appointed, or the safety of his employees secured. Until then, he should act upon his own responsibility and according to his judgment. He made no personal charges, mentioned no names, asked no exemplary prosecution or trial of the offenders, but only demanded a safeguard against a repetition of the offense. His next letter, although less formal and official, was more difficult. It was addressed to the commandant of the nearest Federal barracks, who was an old friend and former companion-in-arms. He alluded to some conversation they had previously exchanged in regard to the presence of a small detachment of troops at Redlands during the elections, which Courtland at the time, however, had diplomatically opposed. He suggested it now as a matter of public expediency and prevention. When he had sealed the letters, not caring to expose them to the espionage of the local postmaster or his ordinary servants, he entrusted

them to one of Miss Sally's own henchmen, to be posted at the next office, at Bitter Creek Station, ten miles distant.

Unfortunately, this duty accomplished, the reaction consequent on his still weak physical condition threw him back upon himself and his memory. He had resolutely refused to think of Miss Sally; he had been able to withstand the suggestions of her in the presence of her handmaid — supposed to be potent in nursing and herb-lore — whom she had detached to wait upon him, and he had returned politely formal acknowledgments to her inquiries. He had determined to continue this personal avoidance as far as possible until he was relieved, on the ground of that *business* expediency which these events had made necessary. She would see that he was only accepting the arguments with which she had met his previous advances. Briefly, he had recourse to that hopeless logic by which a man proves to himself that he had no reason for loving a certain woman, and is as incontestably convinced by the same process that he has. And in the midst of it he weakly fell asleep, and dreamed that he and Miss Sally were walking in the cemetery; that a hideous snake concealed among some lilies, over which the young girl was bending, had uplifted its triangular head to strike. That he seized it by the neck, struggled with it until he was nearly exhausted, when it suddenly collapsed and shrunk, leaving in his palm the limp, crushed, and delicately perfumed little thread glove which he remembered to have once slipped from her hand.

When he awoke, that perfume seemed to be still in the air, distinct from the fresh but homelier scents of the garden which stole through the window. A sense of delicious coolness came with the afternoon breeze, that faintly trilled the slanting slats of the blind with a slumberous humming as of bees. The golden glory of a sinking southern sun was penciling the cheap paper on the wall with leafy tracery and glowing arabesques. But more than that, the calm of some

potent influence — or some unseen presence — was upon him, which he feared a movement might dispel. The chair at the foot of his bed was empty. Sophy had gone out. He did not turn his head to look further; his languid eyes falling aimlessly upon the carpet at his bedside suddenly dilated. For they fell also on the "smallest foot in the State."

He started to his elbow, but a soft hand was laid gently yet firmly upon his shoulder, and with a faint rustle of muslin skirts Miss Sally rose from an unseen chair at the head of his bed, and stood beside him.

"Don't stir, co'nnle, I did n't sit where I could look in yo'r face for fear of waking yo'. But I 'll change seats now." She moved to the chair which Sophy had vacated, drew it slightly nearer the bed, and sat down.

"It was very kind of you — to come," said Courtland hesitatingly, as with a strong effort he drew his eyes away from the fascinating vision, and regained a certain cold composure, "but I am afraid my illness has been greatly magnified. I really am quite well enough to be up and about my business, if the doctor would permit it. But I shall certainly manage to attend to my duty to-morrow, and I hope to be at your service."

"Meaning that yo' don't care to see me *now*, co'nnle," she said lightly, with a faint twinkle in her wise, sweet eyes. "I thought of that, but as my business would n't wait, I brought it to yo'." She took from the folds of her gown a letter. To his utter amazement it was the one he had given his overseer to post to the commandant that morning. To his greater indignation the seal was broken.

"Who has dared?" he demanded, half rising.

Her little hand was thrust out half deprecatingly. "No one yo' can fight, co'nnle; only *me*. I don't generally open other folks' letters, and I would n't have done it for *myself;* I did it for yo'."

"For me?"

"For yo'. I reckoned what yo' *might* do, and I told Sam to bring *me* the letters first. I did n't mind what yo' wrote to the company — for they 'll take care of yo', and their own eggs are all in the same basket. I did n't open *that* one, but I did *this* when I saw the address. It was as I expected, and yo' 'd given yo'self away! For if yo' had those soldiers down here, yo' 'd have a row, sure! Don't move, co'nnle, *yo'* may not care for that, it 's in *yo'r* line. But folks will say that the soldiers were n't sent to prevent *rioting*, but that Co'nnle Courtland was using his old comrades to keep order on his property at Gov'ment expense. Hol' on! Hol' on! co'nnle," said the little figure, rising and waving its pretty arms with a mischievous simulation of terrified deprecation. "Don't shoot! Of course yo' did n't mean *that*, but that 's about the way that So'th'n men will put it to yo'r Gov'ment. For," she continued, more gently, yet with the shrewdest twinkle in her gray eyes, "if yo' really thought the niggers might need Federal protection, yo' 'd have let *me* write to the commandant to send an escort — not to *yo'*, but to *Cato* — that *he* might be able to come back in safety. Yo' 'd have had yo'r soldiers; I 'd have had back my nigger, which" — demurely — "yo' don't seem to worry yo'self much about, co'nnle; and there is n't a So'th'n man would have objected. But," still more demurely, and affectedly smoothing out her crisp skirt with her little hands, "yo' have n't been troubling me much with yo'r counsel lately."

A swift and utterly new comprehension swept over Courtland. For the first time in his knowledge of her he suddenly grasped what was, perhaps, the true conception of her character. Looking at her clearly now, he understood the meaning of those pliant graces, so unaffected and yet always controlled by the reasoning of an unbiased intellect; her frank speech and plausible intonations! Before him stood

the true-born daughter of a long race of politicians! All that he had heard of their dexterity, tact, and expediency rose here incarnate, with the added grace of womanhood. A strange sense of relief— perhaps a dawning of hope — stole over him.

"But how will this insure Cato's safety hereafter, or give protection to the others?" he said, fixing his eyes upon her.

"The future won't concern *yo'* much, co'nnle, if as yo' say here yo'r resignation is sent in, and yo'r successor appointed," she replied, with more gravity than she had previously shown.

"But you do not think I will leave *you* in this uncertainty," he said passionately. He stopped suddenly, his brow darkened. "I forgot," he added coldly, "you will be well protected. Your — *cousin* — will give you the counsel of race — and — closer ties."

To his infinite astonishment, Miss Sally leaned forward in her chair and buried her laughing face in both of her hands. When her dimples had become again visible, she said with an effort, "Don't yo' think, co'nnle, that as a peacemaker my cousin was even a bigger failure than yo'self?"

"I don't understand," stammered Courtland.

"Don't yo' think," she continued, wiping her eyes demurely, "that if a young woman about my size, who had got perfectly tired and sick of all this fuss made about *yo'*, because yo' were a No'th'n man, managing niggers — if that young woman wanted to show her people what sort of a radical and abolitionist a *So'th'n* man of their own sort might become, she 'd have sent for Jack Dumont as a sample? Eh? Only, I declare to goodness, *I* never reckoned that he and Higbee would revive the tomfooling of the vendetta, and take to shootin' each other at once."

"And your sending for your cousin was only a feint to protect me?" said Courtland faintly.

"Perhaps he did n't have to be *sent for*, co'nnle," she said, with a slight touch of coquetry. "Suppose we say, I *let him come*. He 'd be hanging round, for he has property here, and wanted to get me to take it up with mine in the company. I knew what his new views and ideas were, and I thought I 'd better consult Champney — who, being a foreigner, and an older resident than yo', was quite neutral. He did n't happen to tell *yo'* anything about it — did he, co'nnle?" she added, with a grave mouth, but an indescribable twinkle in her eyes.

Courtland's face darkened. "He did — and he further told me, Miss Dows, that he himself was your suitor, and that you had refused him because of the objections of your people."

She raised her eyes to his swiftly and dropped them.

"And yo' think I ought to have accepted him?" she said slowly.

"No! but — you know — you told me" — he began hurriedly. But she had already risen, and was shaking out the folds of her dress.

"We 're not talking *business*, co'nnle — and business was my only excuse for coming here, and taking Sophy's place. I 'll send her in to yo', now."

"But, Miss Dows! — Miss Sally!"

She stopped — hesitated — a singular weakness for so self-contained a nature — and then slowly produced from her pocket a second letter — the one that Courtland had directed to the company. "I did n't read *this* letter, as I just told yo', co'nnle, for I reckon I know what 's in it, but I thought I 'd bring it with me too, in case *yo' changed yo'r mind*."

He raised himself on his pillow as she turned quickly away; but in that single vanishing glimpse of her bright face he saw what neither he nor any one else had ever seen upon the face of Sally Dows — a burning blush!

"Miss Sally!" He almost leaped from the bed, but she was gone. There was another rustle at the door — the entrance of Sophy.

"Call her back, Sophy, quick!" he said.

The negress shook her turbaned head. "Not much, honey! When Miss Sally say she goes — she done gone, shuah!"

"But, Sophy!" Perhaps something in the significant face of the girl tempted him; perhaps it was only an impulse of his forgotten youth. "Sophy!" appealingly — "tell me! — is Miss Sally engaged to her cousin?"

"Wat dat?" said Sophy in indignant scorn. "Miss Sally engaged to dat Dumont! What fo'? Yo' 're crazy! No!"

"Nor Champney? Tell me, Sophy, has she a *lover?*"

For a moment the whites of Sophy's eyes were uplifted in speechless scorn. "Yo' ask dat! Yo' lyin' dar wid dat snake-bit arm! Yo' lyin' dar, and Miss Sally — who has only to whistle to call de fust quality in de State raoun her — coming and going here wid you, and trotting on yo'r arrants — and yo' ask dat! Yes! she has a lover, and what's mo', she *can't help it;* and yo' 're her lover; and what's mo', *yo'* can't help it, either! And yo' can't back out of it now — bofe of yo' — nebber! Fo' yo' 're hers, and she's yo'rs — fo'ebber. For she sucked yo' blood."

"What!" gasped Courtland, aghast at what he believed to be the sudden insanity of the negress.

"Yes! Whar 's yo'r eyes? whar 's yo'r years? who 's yo' dat yo' did n't see nor heah nuffin? When dey dragged yo' outer de swamp dat night — wid de snake bite fresh on yo'r arm — did n't *she,* dat poh chile! — dat same Miss Sally — frow herself down on yo,' and put dat baby mouf of hers to de wound and suck out de pizen and sabe de life ob yo' at de risk ob her own? Say? And if dey 's any

troof in Hoo-doo, don't dat make yo' one blood and one soul! Go way, white man! I'm sick of yo'. Stop dar! Lie down dar! Hol' on, co'nnle, for massy's sake. Well, dar — I 'll call her back!"

And she did!

"Look here — don't you know — it rather took me by surprise," said Champney, a few days later, with a hearty grip of the colonel's uninjured hand; "but I don't bear malice, old fellow, and, by Jove! it was *such* a sensible, all-round, businesslike choice for the girl to make that no wonder we never thought of it before. Hang it all, you see a fellow was always so certain it would be something out of the way and detrimental, don't you know, that would take the fancy of a girl like that — somebody like that cousin of hers or Higbee, or even *me*, by Jove! that we never thought of looking beyond our noses — never thought of the *business!* And *you* all the time so cold and silent and matter-of-fact about it! But I congratulate you! You 've got the business down on a safe basis now, and what 's more, you 've got the one woman who can run it."

They say he was a true prophet. At least the syndicate affairs prospered, and in course of time even the Reeds and the Higbees participated in the benefits. There were no more racial disturbances; only the districts polled a peaceful and *smaller* Democratic majority at the next election. There were not wanting those who alleged that Colonel Courtland had simply become *Mrs. Courtland's superintendent;* that she had absorbed him as she had every one who had come under her influence, and that she would not rest until she had made him a Senator (to represent Mrs. Courtland) in the councils of the nation. But when I last dined with them in Washington, ten years ago, I found

them both very happy and comfortable, and I remember that Mrs. Courtland's remarks upon Federal and State interests, the proper education of young girls, and the management of the family, were eminently wise and practical.

THE CONSPIRACY OF MRS. BUNKER

PART I

On the northerly shore of San Francisco Bay a line of bluffs terminates in a promontory, at whose base, formed by the crumbling débris of the cliff above, there is a narrow stretch of beach, salt meadow, and scrub oak. The abrupt wall of rock behind it seems to isolate it as completely from the mainland as the sea before it separates it from the opposite shore. In spite of its contiguity to San Francisco, — opposite also, but hidden by the sharp reëntering curve of coast, — the locality was wild, uncultivated, and unfrequented. A solitary fisherman's cabin half hidden in the rocks was the only trace of habitation. White drifts of sea-gulls and pelican across the face of the cliff, gray clouds of sandpipers rising from the beach, the dripping flight of ducks over the salt meadows, and the occasional splash of a seal from the rocks, were the only signs of life that could be seen from the decks of passing ships. And yet the fisherman's cabin was occupied by Zephas Bunker and his young wife, and he had succeeded in wresting from the hard soil pasturage for a cow and goats, while his lateen-sailed fishing-boat occasionally rode quietly in the sheltered cove below.

Three years ago Zephas Bunker, an ex-whaler, had found himself stranded on a San Francisco wharf and had "hired out" to a small Petaluma farmer. At the end of a year he had acquired little taste for the farmer's business, but considerable for the farmer's youthful daughter, who, equally

weary of small agriculture, had consented to elope with him in order to escape it. They were married at Oakland; he put his scant earnings into a fishing-boat, discovered the site for his cabin, and brought his bride thither. The novelty of the change pleased her, although perhaps it was but little advance on her previous humble position. Yet she preferred her present freedom to the bare restricted home life of her past; the perpetual presence of the restless sea was a relief to the old monotony of the wheat-field and its isolated drudgery. For Mary's youthful fancy, thinly sustained in childhood by the lightest literary food, had neither been stimulated nor disillusioned by her marriage. That practical experience which is usually the end of girlish romance had left her still a child in sentiment. The long absences of her husband in his fishing-boat kept her from wearying of or even knowing his older and unequal companionship; it gave her a freedom her girlhood had never known, yet added a protection that suited her still childish dependency, while it tickled her pride with its equality. When not engaged in her easy household duties in her three-roomed cottage, or the care of her rocky garden patch, she found time enough to indulge her fancy over the mysterious haze that wrapped the invisible city so near and yet unknown to her; in the sails that slipped in and out of the Golden Gate, but of whose destination she knew nothing; and in the long smoke trail of the mail steamer which had yet brought her no message. Like all dwellers by the sea, her face and her thoughts were more frequently turned towards it; and as with them, it also seemed to her that whatever change was coming into her life would come across that vast unknown expanse. But it was here that Mrs. Bunker was mistaken.

It had been a sparkling summer morning. The waves were running before the dry northwest trade-winds with crystalline but colorless brilliancy. Sheltered by the high, northerly bluff, the house and its garden were exposed to

the untempered heat of the cloudless sun refracted from the rocky wall behind it. Some tarpaulin and ropes lying among the rocks were sticky and odorous; the scrub oaks and manzanita bushes gave out the aroma of baking wood; occasionally a faint potpourri fragrance from the hot wild roses and beach grass was blown along the shore; even the lingering odors of Bunker's vocation and of Mrs. Bunker's cooking were idealized and refined by the saline breath of the sea at the doors and windows. Mrs. Bunker, in the dazzling sun, bending over her peas and lettuces with a small hoe, felt the comfort of her brown holland sunbonnet. Secure in her isolation, she unbuttoned the neck of her gown for air, and did not put up the strand of black hair that had escaped over her shoulder. It was very hot in the lee of the bluff, and very quiet in that still air. So quiet that she heard two distinct reports, following each other quickly, but very faint and far. She glanced mechanically towards the sea. Two merchantmen in midstream were shaking out their wings for a long flight, a pilot-boat and coasting schooner were rounding the point, but there was no smoke from their decks. She bent over her work again, and in another moment had forgotten it. But the heat, with the dazzling reflection from the cliff, forced her to suspend her gardening, and stroll along the beach to the extreme limit of her domain. Here she looked after the cow that had also strayed away through the tangled bush for coolness. The goats, impervious to temperature, were basking in inaccessible fastnesses on the cliff itself that made her eyes ache to climb. Over an hour passed, she was returning, and had neared her house, when she was suddenly startled to see the figure of a man between her and the cliff. He was engaged in brushing his dusty clothes with a handkerchief, and although he saw her coming, and even moved slowly towards her, continued his occupation with a half-impatient, half-abstracted air. Her feminine

perception was struck with the circumstance that he was in deep black, with scarcely a gleam of white showing even at his throat, and that he wore a tall black hat. Without knowing anything of social customs, it seemed to her that his dress was inconsistent with his appearance there.

"Good-morning," he said, lifting his hat with a preoccupied air. "Do you live here?"

"Yes," she said wonderingly.

"Anybody else?"

"My husband."

"I mean any other people? Are there any other houses?" he said, with a slight impatience.

"No."

He looked at her and then towards the sea. "I expect some friends who are coming for me in a boat. I suppose they can land easily here?"

"Did n't you yourself land here just now?" she said quickly.

He half hesitated, and then, as if scorning an equivocation, made a hasty gesture over her shoulder and said bluntly, "No, I came over the cliff."

"Down the cliff?" she repeated incredulously.

"Yes," he said, glancing at his clothes; "it was a rough scramble, but the goats showed me the way."

"And you were up on the bluff all the time?" she went on curiously.

"Yes. You see — I" — he stopped suddenly at what seemed to be the beginning of a prearranged and plausible explanation, as if impatient of its weakness or hypocrisy, and said briefly, "Yes, I was there."

Like most women, more observant of his face and figure, she did not miss this lack of explanation. He was a very good-looking man of middle age, with a thin, proud, high-bred face, which in a country of bearded men had the further distinction of being smoothly shaven. She had

never seen any one like him before. She thought he looked like an illustration of some novel she had read, but also somewhat melancholy, worn, and tired.

"Won't you come in and rest yourself?" she said, motioning to the cabin.

"Thank you," he said, still half absently. "Perhaps I'd better. It may be some time yet before they come."

She led the way to the cabin, entered the living room — a plainly furnished little apartment between the bedroom and the kitchen — pointed to a large bamboo armchair, and placed a bottle of whiskey and some water on the table before him. He thanked her again very gently, poured out some spirits in his glass, and mixed it with water. But when she glanced towards him again he had apparently risen without tasting it, and going to the door was standing there with his hand in the breast of his buttoned frock coat, gazing silently towards the sea. There was something vaguely historical in his attitude — or what she thought might be historical — as of somebody of great importance who had halted on the eve of some great event at the door of her humble cabin.

His apparent unconsciousness of her and of his surroundings, his preoccupation with something far beyond her ken, far from piquing her, only excited her interest the more. And then there was such an odd sadness in his eyes.

"Are you anxious for your folks' coming?" she said at last, following his outlook.

"I — oh no!" he returned, quickly recalling himself, "they'll be sure to come — sooner or later. No fear of that," he added, half smilingly, half wearily.

Mrs. Bunker passed into the kitchen, where, while apparently attending to her household duties, she could still observe her singular guest. Left alone, he seated himself mechanically in the chair, and gazed fixedly at the fireplace. He remained a long time so quiet and unmoved, in spite of

the marked ostentatious clatter Mrs. Bunker found it necessary to make with her dishes, that an odd fancy that he was scarcely a human visitant began to take possession of her. Yet she was not frightened. She remembered distinctly afterwards that, far from having any concern for herself, she was only moved by a strange and vague admiration of him.

But her prolonged scrutiny was not without effect. Suddenly he raised his dark eyes, and she felt him pierce the obscurity of her kitchen with a quick, suspicious, impatient penetration, which as they met hers gave way, however, to a look that she thought was gently reproachful. Then he rose, stretched himself to his full height, and approaching the kitchen door leaned listlessly against the door-post.

"I don't suppose you are ever lonely here?"

"No, sir."

"Of course not. You have yourself and husband. Nobody interferes with you. You are contented and happy together."

Mrs. Bunker did not say, what was the fact, that she had never before connected the sole companionship of her husband with her happiness. Perhaps it had never occurred to her until that moment how little it had to do with it. She only smiled gratefully at the change in her guest's abstraction.

"Do you often go to San Francisco?" he continued.

"I have never been there at all. Some day I expect we will go there to live."

"I would n't advise you to," he said, looking at her gravely. "I don't think it will pay you. You 'll never be happy there as here. You 'll never have the independence and freedom you have here. You 'll never be your own mistress again. But how does it happen you never were in San Francisco?" he said suddenly.

If he would not talk of himself, here at least was a

chance for Mrs. Bunker to say something. She related how her family had emigrated from Kansas across the plains and had taken up a "location" at Contra Costa. How she did n't care for it, and how she came to marry the seafaring man who brought her here — all with great simplicity and frankness and as unreservedly as to a superior being — albeit his attention wandered at times, and a rare but melancholy smile that he had apparently evoked to meet her conversational advances became fixed occasionally. Even his dark eyes, which had obliged Mrs. Bunker to put up her hair and button her collar, rested upon her without seeing her.

"Then your husband's name is Bunker?" he said, when she paused at last. "That 's one of those Nantucket Quaker names — sailors and whalers for generations — and yours, you say, was MacEwan. Well, Mrs. Bunker, *your* family came from Kentucky to Kansas only lately, though I suppose your father calls himself a Free-States man. You ought to know something of farming and cattle, for your ancestors were old Scotch Covenanters who emigrated a hundred years ago, and were great stock raisers."

All this seemed only the natural omniscience of a superior being. And Mrs. Bunker perhaps was not pained to learn that her husband's family was of a lower degree than her own. But the stranger's knowledge did not end there. He talked of her husband's business — he explained the vast fishing resources of the bay and coast. He showed her how the large colony of Italian fishermen were inimical to the interests of California and to her husband — particularly as a native American trader. He told her of the volcanic changes of the bay and coast line, of the formation of the rocky ledge on which she lived. He pointed out to her its value to the Government for defensive purposes, and how it naturally commanded the entrance of the Golden Gate far better than Fort Point, and that it ought to be in its

hands. If the Federal Government did not buy it of her husband, certainly the State of California should. And here he fell into an abstraction as deep and as gloomy as before. He walked to the window, paced the floor with his hand in his breast, went to the door, and finally stepped out of the cabin, moving along the ledge of rocks to the shore, where he stood motionless.

Mrs. Bunker had listened to him with parted lips and eyes of eloquent admiration. She had never before heard any one talk like *that* — she had not believed it possible that any one could have such knowledge. Perhaps she could not understand all he said, but she would try to remember it after he had gone. She could only think now how kind it was of him that in all this mystery of his coming, and in the singular sadness that was oppressing him, he should try to interest her. And thus looking at him, and wondering, an idea came to her.

She went into her bedroom and took down her husband's heavy pilot overcoat and sou'wester, and handed them to her guest.

"You 'd better put them on if you 're going to stand there," she said.

"But I am not cold," he said wonderingly.

"But you might be *seen*," she said simply.

It was the first suggestion that had passed between them that his presence there was a secret. He looked at her intently, then he smiled and said, "I think you 're right, for many reasons," put the pilot coat over his frock coat, removed his hat with the gesture of a bow, handed it to her, and placed the sou'wester in its stead. Then for an instant he hesitated as if about to speak, but Mrs. Bunker, with a delicacy that she could not herself comprehend at the moment, hurried back to the cabin without giving him an opportunity.

Nor did she again intrude upon his meditations. Hidden

in his disguise, which to her eyes did not, however, seem to conceal his characteristic figure, he wandered for nearly an hour under the bluff and along the shore, returning at last almost mechanically to the cabin, where, oblivious of his surroundings, he reseated himself in silence by the table with his cheek resting on his hand. Presently, her quick, experienced ear detected the sound of oars in their rowlocks; she could plainly see from her kitchen window a small boat with two strangers seated at the stern being pulled to the shore. With the same strange instinct of delicacy, she determined not to go out lest her presence might embarrass her guest's reception of his friends. But as she turned towards the living room she found he had already risen and was removing his hat and pilot coat. She was struck, however, by the circumstance that not only did he exhibit no feeling of relief at his deliverance, but that a half-cynical, half-savage expression had taken the place of his former melancholy. As he went to the door, the two gentlemen hastily clambered up the rocks to greet him.

"Jim reckoned it was you hangin' round the rocks, but I could n't tell at that distance. Seemed you borrowed a hat and coat. Well — it 's all fixed, and we 've no time to lose. There 's a coasting steamer just dropping down below the Heads, and it will take you aboard. But I can tell you you 've kicked up a h—ll of a row over there." He stopped, evidently at some sign from her guest. The rest of the man's speech followed in a hurried whisper, which was stopped again by the voice she knew. "No. Certainly not." The next moment his tall figure was darkening the door of the kitchen; his hand was outstretched. "Good-by, Mrs. Bunker, and many thanks for your hospitality. My friends here," he turned grimly to the men behind him, "think I ought to ask you to keep this a secret even from your husband. *I don't!* They also think that I ought to offer you money for your kind-

ness. *I don't!* But if you will honor me by keeping this ring in remembrance of it" — he took a heavy seal ring from his finger — "it's the only bit of jewelry I have about me — I'll be very glad. Good-by!" She felt for a moment the firm, soft pressure of his long, thin fingers around her own, and then — he was gone. The sound of retreating oars grew fainter and fainter and was lost. The same reserve of delicacy which now appeared to her as a duty kept her from going to the window to watch the destination of the boat. No, he should go as he came, without her supervision or knowledge.

Nor did she feel lonely afterwards. On the contrary, the silence and solitude of the isolated domain had a new charm. They kept the memory of her experience intact, and enabled her to refill it with his presence. She could see his tall figure again pausing before her cabin, without the incongruous association of another personality; she could hear his voice again, unmingled with one more familiar. For the first time, the regular absence of her husband seemed an essential good fortune instead of an accident of their life. For the experience belonged to *her*, and not to him and her together. He could not understand it; he would have acted differently and spoiled it. She should not tell him anything of it, in spite of the stranger's suggestion, which, of course, he had only made because he did n't know Zephas as well as she did. For Mrs. Bunker was getting on rapidly; it was her first admission of the conjugal knowledge that one's husband is inferior to the outside estimate of him. The next step — the belief that he was deceiving *her* as he was *them* — would be comparatively easy.

Nor should she show him the ring. The stranger had certainly never said anything about that! It was a heavy ring, with a helmeted head carved on its red carnelian stone, and what looked like strange letters around it. It

fitted her third finger perfectly; but *his* fingers were small, and he had taken it from his little finger. She should keep it herself. Of course, if it had been money, she would have given it to Zephas; but the stranger knew that she would n't take money. How firmly he had said that "I don't!" She felt the warm blood fly to her fresh young face at the thought of it. He had understood her. She might be living in a poor cabin, doing all the housework herself, and her husband only a fisherman, but he had treated her like a lady.

And so the afternoon passed. The outlying fog began to roll in at the Golden Gate, obliterating the headland and stretching a fleecy bar across the channel as if shutting out from vulgar eyes the way that he had gone. Night fell, but Zephas had not yet come. This was unusual, for he was generally as regular as the afternoon "trades" which blew him there. There was nothing to detain him in this weather and at this season. She began to be vaguely uneasy; then a little angry at this new development of his incompatibility. Then it occurred to her, for the first time in her wifehood, to think what she would do if he were lost. Yet, in spite of some pain, terror, and perplexity at the possibility, her dominant thought was that she would be a free woman to order her life as she liked.

It was after ten before his lateen sail flapped in the little cove. She was waiting to receive him on the shore. His good-humored hirsute face was slightly apologetic in expression, but flushed and disturbed with some new excitement to which an extra glass or two of spirits had apparently added intensity. The contrast between his evident indulgence and the previous abstemiousness of her late guest struck her unpleasantly. "Well — I declare," she said indignantly, "so *that 's* what kept you!"

"No," he said quickly; "there 's been awful times over in 'Frisco! Everybody just wild, and the Vigilance

Committee in session. Jo Henderson 's killed! Shot by Wynyard Marion in a duel! He 'll be lynched, sure as a gun, if they ketch him."

"But I thought men who fought duels always went free."

"Yes, but this ain't no common duel; they say the whole thing was planned beforehand by them Southern fire-eaters to get rid o' Henderson because he 's a Northern man and anti-slavery, and that they picked out Colonel Marion to do it because he was a dead shot. They got him to insult Henderson, so he was bound to challenge Marion, and that giv' Marion the chyce of weppings. It was a reg'lar put-up job to kill him."

"And what 's all this to do with you?" she asked, with irritation.

"Hold on, won't you! and I 'll tell you. I was pickin' up nets off Saucelito about noon, when I was hailed by one of them Vigilance tugs, and they set me to stand off and on the shore and watch that Marion did n't get away, while they were scoutin' inland. Ye see *the duel took place just over the bluff there — behind ye* — and they allowed that Marion had struck away north for Mendocino to take ship there. For after overhaulin' his second's boat, they found out that they had come away from Saucelito *alone*. But they sent a tug around by sea to Mendocino to head him off there, while they 're closin' in around him inland. They 're bound to catch him sooner or later. But you ain't listenin', Mollie?"

She was — in every fibre — but with her head turned towards the window, and the invisible Golden Gate through which the fugitive had escaped. For she saw it all now — that glorious vision — her high-bred, handsome guest and Wynyard Marion were one and the same person. And this rough, commonplace man before her — her own husband — had been basely set to capture him!

PART II

During that evening and the next, Mrs. Bunker without betraying her secret, or exciting the least suspicion on the part of her husband, managed to extract from him not only a rough description of Marion which tallied with her own impressions, but a short history of his career. He was a famous politician who had held high office in the South; he was an accomplished lawyer; he had served in the army; he was a fiery speaker; he had a singular command of men. He was unmarried, but there were queer stories of his relations with some of the wives of prominent officials, and there was no doubt that he used them in some of his political intrigues. He, Zephas, would bet something that it was a woman who had helped him off! Did she speak?

Yes, she had spoken. It made her sick to sit there and hear such stories! Because a man did not agree with some people in politics it was perfectly awful to think how they would abuse him and take away his character! Men were so awfully jealous, too; if another man happened to be superior and fine looking there was n't anything bad enough for them to say about him! No! she was n't a slavery sympathizer either, and had n't anything to do with man politics, although she was a Southern woman, and the MacEwans had come from Kentucky and owned slaves. Of course, he, Zephas, whose ancestors were Cape Cod Quakers and had always been sailors, could n't understand. She did not know what he meant by saying "what a long tail our cat 's got," but if he meant to call her a cat, and was going to use such language to her, he had better have stayed in San Francisco with his Vigilance friends. And perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed there before he took her away from her parents at

Martinez. Then she would n't have been left on a desert rock without any chance of seeing the world, or ever making any friends or acquaintances!

It was their first quarrel. Discreetly made up by Mrs. Bunker in some alarm at betraying herself; honestly forgiven by Zephas in a rude, remorseful consciousness of her limited life. One or two nights later, when he returned, it was with a mingled air of mystery and satisfaction. "Well, Mollie," he said cheerfully, "it looks as if your pets were not as bad as I thought them."

"My pets!" repeated Mrs. Bunker, with a faint rising of color.

"Well, I call these Southern Chivs your pets, Mollie, because you stuck up for them so the other night. But never mind that now. What do you suppose has happened? Jim Rider, you know, the Southern banker and speculator, who 's a regular big Injin among the 'Chivs,' he sent Cap Simmons down to the wharf while I was unloadin' to come up and see him. Well, I went, and what do y'u think? He told me he was gettin' up an American Fishin' Company, and wanted me to take charge of a first-class schooner on shares. Said he heard of me afore, and knew I was an American and a white man, and just the chap ez could knock them Eytalians outer the market"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Bunker quickly, but emphatically, "the fishing interest ought to be American and protected by the State, with regular charters and treaties."

"I say, Mollie," said her astonished but admiring husband, "you've been readin' the papers or listenin' to stump speakin' sure."

"Go on," returned Mrs. Bunker impatiently, "and say what happened next."

"Well," returned Zephas, "I first thought, you see, that it had suthin' to do with that Marion business, partick

lerly ez folks allowed he was hidin' somewhere yet, and they wanted me to run him off. So I thought Rider might as well know that I was n't to be bribed, so I ups and tells him how I 'd been lyin' off Saucelito the other day workin' for the other side agin him. With that he laughs, says he did n't want any better friends than me, but that I must be livin' in the backwoods not to know that Wynyard Marion had escaped, and was then at sea on his way to Mexico or Central America. Then we agreed to terms, and the long and short of it is, Mollie, that I 'm to have the schooner with a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and ten per cent. shares after a year! Looks like biz, eh, Mollie, old girl? but you don't seem pleased."

She had put aside the arm with which he was drawing her to him, and had turned her white face away to the window. So *he* had gone — this stranger — this one friend of her life — she would never see him again, and all that would ever come of it was this pecuniary benefit to her husband, who had done nothing. He would not even offer her money, but he had managed to pay his debt to her in this way that their vulgar poverty would appreciate. And this was the end of her dream!

"You don't seem to take it in, Mollie," continued the surprised Zephas. "It means a house in 'Frisco and a little cabin for you on the schooner when you like."

"I don't want it! I won't have it! I shall stay here," she burst out, with a half-passionate, half-childish cry, and ran into her bedroom, leaving the astonished Zephas helpless in his awkward consternation.

"By Gum! I must take her to 'Frisco right off, or she 'll be havin' the high strikes here alone. I oughter knowed it would come to this!" But although he consulted "Cap" Simmons the next day, who informed him it was all woman's ways when "struck," and advised him to pay out all the line he could at such delicate moments, she had

no recurrence of the outbreak. On the contrary, for days and weeks following she seemed calmer, older, and more "growed up;" although she resisted changing her seashore dwelling for San Francisco, she accompanied him on one or two of his "deep sea" trips down the coast, and seemed happier on their southern limits. She had taken to reading the political papers and speeches, and some cheap American histories. Captain Bunker's crew, profoundly convinced that their skipper's wife was a "woman's rights" fanatic, with the baleful qualities of "sea lawyer" superadded, marveled at his bringing her.

It was on returning home from one of these trips that they touched briefly at San Francisco, where the Secretary of the Fishing Company came on board. Mrs. Bunker was startled to recognize in him one of the two gentlemen who had taken Mr. Marion off in the boat, but as he did not appear to recognize her even after an awkward introduction by her husband, she would have recovered her equanimity but for a singular incident. As her husband turned momentarily away, the Secretary, with a significant gesture, slipped a letter into her hand. She felt the blood rush to her face as, with a smile, he moved away to follow her husband. She came down to the little cabin and impatiently tore open the envelope, which bore no address. A small folded note contained the following lines: —

I never intended to burden you with my confidence, but the discretion, tact, and courage you displayed on our first meeting, and what I know of your loyalty since, have prompted me to trust myself again to your kindness, even though you are now aware whom you have helped, and the risks you ran. My friends wish to communicate with me and to forward to me, from time to time, certain papers of importance, which, owing to the tyrannical espionage of the Government, would be discovered and stopped in passing

through the express or post-office. These papers will be left at your house, but here I must trust entirely to your wit and judgment as to the way in which they should be delivered to my agent at the nearest Mexican port. To facilitate your action, your husband will receive directions to pursue his course as far south as Todos Santos, where a boat will be ready to take charge of them when he is sighted. I know I am asking a great favor, but I have such confidence in you that I do not even ask you to commit yourself to a reply to this. If it can be done I know that you will do it; if it cannot, I will understand and appreciate the reason why. I will only ask you that when you are ready to receive the papers you will fly a small red pennant from the little flagstaff among the rocks. Believe me, your friend and grateful debtor, W. M.

Mrs. Bunker cast a hasty glance around her, and pressed the letter to her lips. It was a sudden consummation of her vaguest, half-formed wishes, the realization of her wildest dreams! To be the confidante of the gallant but melancholy hero in his lonely exile and persecution was to satisfy all the unformulated romantic fancies of her girlish reading; to be later, perhaps, the Flora Macdonald of a middle-aged Prince Charlie did not, however, evoke any ludicrous associations in her mind. Her feminine fancy exalted the escaped duelist and alleged assassin into a social martyr. His actual small political intrigues and ignoble aims of office seemed to her little different from those aspirations of royalty which she had read about — as perhaps they were. Indeed, it is to be feared that in foolish little Mrs. Bunker, Wynyard Marion had found the old feminine adoration of pretension and privilege which every rascal has taken advantage of since the Flood.

Howbeit, the next morning after she had returned and Zephas had sailed away, she flew a red bandana handkerchief

on the little flagstaff before the house. A few hours later, a boat appeared mysteriously from around the Point. Its only occupant — a common sailor — asked her name, and handed her a sealed package. Mrs. Bunker's invention had already been at work. She had created an aunt in Mexico, for whom she had, with some ostentation, made some small purchases while in San Francisco. When her husband spoke of going as far south as Todos Santos, she begged him to deliver the parcel to her aunt's messenger, and even addressed it boldly to her. Inside the outer wrapper she wrote a note to Marion, which, with a new and amazing diffidence, she composed and altered a dozen times, at last addressing the following in a large, schoolgirl hand: "Sir, I obey your commands to the last. Whatever your oppressors or enemies may do, you can always rely and trust upon She who in deepest sympathy signs herself ever, Mollie Rosalie MacEwan."

The substitution of her maiden name in full seemed in her simplicity to be a delicate exclusion of her husband from the affair, and a certain disguise of herself to alien eyes. The superscription, "To Mrs. Marion MacEwan from Mollie Bunker, to be called for by hand at Todos Santos," also struck her as a marvel of ingenuity. The package was safely and punctually delivered by Zephas, who brought back a small packet directed to her, which on private examination proved to contain a letter addressed to "J. E. Kirby, to be called for," with the hurried line: "A thousand thanks, W. M." Mrs. Bunker drew a long, quick breath. He might have written more; he might have — but the wish remained still unformulated. The next day she ran up a signal; the same boat and solitary rower appeared around the Point, and took the package. A week later, when her husband was ready for sea, she again hoisted her signal. It brought a return package for Mexico, which she inclosed and readdressed, and gave to her husband.

The recurrence of this incident apparently struck a bright idea from the simple Zephas.

"Look here, Mollie, why don't you come *yourself* and see your aunt. I can't go into port without a license, and them port charges cost a heap o' red tape, for they 've got a Filibuster scare on down there just now, but you can go ashore in the boat and I 'll get permission from the Secretary to stand off and wait for you there for twenty-four hours." Mrs. Bunker flushed and paled at the thought. She could see him! The letter would be sufficient excuse; the distrust suggested by her husband would give color to her delivering it in person. There was perhaps a brief twinge of conscience in taking this advantage of Zephas's kindness, but the next moment, with that peculiar logic known only to the sex, she made the unfortunate man's suggestion a condonation of her deceit. *She* had n't asked to go; *he* had offered to take her. He had only himself to thank.

Meantime the political excitement, in which she had become a partisan without understanding or even conviction, presently culminated with the Presidential campaign and the election of Abraham Lincoln. The intrigues of Southern statesmen were revealed in open expression, and echoed in California by those citizens of Southern birth and extraction who had long held place, power, and opinion there. There were rumors of secession, of California joining the South, or of her founding an independent Pacific Empire. A note from "J. E. Kirby" informed Mrs. Bunker that she was to carefully retain any correspondence that might be in her hands until further orders, almost at the same time that Zephas as regretfully told her that his projected Southern trip had been suspended. Mrs. Bunker was disappointed, and yet, in some singular conditions of her feelings, felt relieved that her meeting with Marion was postponed. It is to be feared that some dim conviction,

unworthy a partisan, that in the magnitude of political events her own petty personality might be overlooked by her hero tended somewhat to her resignation.

Meanwhile the seasons had changed. The winter rains had set in; the trade-winds had shifted to the southeast, and the cottage, although strengthened, enlarged, and made more comfortable through the good fortune of the Bunkers, was no longer sheltered by the cliff, but was exposed to the full strength of the Pacific gales. There were long nights when she could hear the rain fall monotonously on the shingles, or startle her with a short, sharp reveille on the windows; there were brief days of flying clouds and drifting sunshine, and intervals of dull gray shadow, when the heaving white breakers beyond the Gate slowly lifted themselves and sank before her like wraiths of warning. At such times, in her accepted solitude, Mrs. Bunker gave herself up to strange moods and singular visions; the more audacious and more striking it seemed to her from their very remoteness, and the difficulty she was beginning to have in materializing them. The actual personality of Wynyard Marion, as she knew it in her one interview, had become very shadowy and faint in the months that passed, yet when the days were heavy, she sometimes saw herself standing by his side in some vague tropical surroundings, and hailed by the multitude as the faithful wife and consort of the great Leader, President, Emperor — she knew not what! Exactly how this was to be managed, and the manner of Zephas's effacement from the scene, never troubled her childish fancy, and, it is but fair to say, her woman's conscience. In the logic before alluded to, it seemed to her that all ethical responsibility for her actions rested with the husband who had unduly married her. Nor were those visions always roseate. In the wild declamation of that exciting epoch which filled the newspapers there was talk of short shrift with traitors. So there were

days when the sudden onset of a squall of hail against her window caused her to start as if she had heard the sharp fusillade of that file of muskets of which she had sometimes read in history.

One day she had a singular fright. She had heard the sound of oars falling with a precision and regularity unknown to her. She was startled to see the approach of a large eight-oared barge rowed by men in uniform, with two officers wrapped in cloaks in the stern-sheets, and before them the glitter of musket barrels. The two officers appeared to be conversing earnestly, and occasionally pointing to the shore and the bluff above. For an instant she trembled, and then an instinct of revolt and resistance followed. She hurriedly removed the ring, which she usually wore when alone, from her finger, slipped it with the packet under the mattress of her bed, and prepared with blazing eyes to face the intruders. But when the boat was beached, the two officers, with scarcely a glance towards the cottage, proceeded leisurely along the shore. Relieved, yet it must be confessed a little piqued at their indifference, she snatched up her hat and sallied forth to confront them.

"I suppose you don't know that this is private property?" she said sharply.

The group halted and turned towards her. The orderly, who was following, turned his face aside and smiled. The younger officer demurely lifted his cap. The elder, gray, handsome, in a general's uniform, after a moment's half-astounded, half-amused scrutiny of the little figure, gravely raised his gauntleted fingers in a military salute.

"I beg your pardon, madam, but I am afraid we never even thought of that. We are making a preliminary survey for the Government with a possible view of fortifying the bluff. It is very doubtful if you will be disturbed in any rights you may have, but if you are, the Government will not fail to make it good to you." He turned carelessly

to the aide beside him. "I suppose the bluff is quite inaccessible from here?"

"I don't know about that, general. They say that Marion, after he killed Henderson, escaped down this way," said the young man.

"Indeed, what good was that? How did he get away from here?"

"They say that Mrs. Fairfax was hanging round in a boat, waiting for him. The story of the escape is all out now."

They moved away with a slight perfunctory bow to Mrs. Bunker, only the younger officer noting that the pert, pretty little Western woman was n't as sharp and snappy to his superior as she had at first promised to be.

She turned back to the cottage astounded, angry, and vaguely alarmed. Who was this Mrs. Fairfax who had usurped her fame and solitary devotion? There was no woman in the boat that took him off; it was equally well known that he went in the ship alone. If they had heard that some woman was with him here — why should they have supposed it was Mrs. Fairfax? Zephas might know something — but he was away. The thought haunted her that day and the next. On the third came a more startling incident.

She had been wandering along the edge of her domain, in a state of restlessness which had driven her from the monotony of the house, when she heard the barking of the big Newfoundland dog which Zephas had lately bought for protection and company. She looked up and saw the boat and its solitary rower at the landing. She ran quickly to the house to bring the packet. As she entered she started back in amazement. For the sitting-room was already in possession of a woman who was seated calmly by the table.

The stranger turned on Mrs. Bunker that frankly insolent glance and deliberate examination which only one

woman can give another. In that glance Mrs. Bunker felt herself in the presence of a superior, even if her own eyes had not told her that in beauty, attire, and bearing the intruder was of a type and condition far beyond her own, or even that of any she had known. It was the more crushing that there also seemed to be in this haughty woman the same incongruousness and sharp contrast to the plain and homely surroundings of the cottage that she remembered in *him*.

"Yo' aw Mrs. Bunker, I believe," she said in languid Southern accents. "How de doh?"

"I am Mrs. Bunker," said Mrs. Bunker shortly.

"And so this is where Cunnle Marion stopped when he waited fo' the boat to take him off," said the stranger, glancing lazily around, and delaying with smiling insolence the explanation she knew Mrs. Bunker was expecting. "The cunnle said it was a pooh enough place, but I don't see it. I reckon, however, he was too worried to judge and glad enough to get off. Yo' ought to have made him talk — he generally don't want much prompting to talk to women, if they 're pooty."

"He did n't seem in a hurry to go," said Mrs. Bunker indignantly. The next moment she saw her error, even before the cruel, handsome smile of her unbidden guest revealed it.

"I thought so," she said lazily; "this *is* the place and here 's where the cunnle stayed. Only yo' ought n't have given him and yo'self away to the first stranger quite so easy. The cunnle might have taught yo' *that* the two or three hours he was with yo'."

"What do you want with me?" demanded Mrs. Bunker angrily.

"I want a letter yo' have for me from Cunnle Marion."

"I have nothing for you," said Mrs. Bunker. "I don't know who you are."

"You ought to, considering you 've been acting as messenger between the cunnle and me," said the lady coolly.

"That 's not true," said Mrs. Bunker hotly, to combat an inward sinking.

The lady rose with a lazy, languid grace, walked to the door and called still lazily, "O Pedro!"

The solitary rower clambered up the rocks and appeared on the cottage threshold.

"Is this the lady who gave you the letters for me and to whom you took mine?"

"Si, señora."

"They were addressed to a Mr. Kirby," said Mrs. Bunker sullenly. "How was I to know they were for Mrs. Kirby?"

"Mr. Kirby, Mrs. Kirby, and myself are all the same. You don't suppose the cunnle would give my real name and address? Did you address yo'r packet to *his* real name or to some one else? Did you let your husband know who they were for?"

Oddly, a sickening sense of the meanness of all these deceits and subterfuges suddenly came over Mrs. Bunker. Without replying she went to her bedroom and returned with Colonel Marion's last letter, which she tossed into her visitor's lap.

"Thank yo', Mrs. Bunker. I 'll be sure to tell the cunnle how careful yo' were not to give up his correspondence to everybody. It 'll please him mo' than to hear yo' are wearing his ring — which everybody knows — before people."

"He gave it to me — he — he knew I would n't take money," said Mrs. Bunker indignantly.

"He did n't have any to give," said the lady slowly, as she removed the envelope from her letter and looked up with a dazzling but cruel smile. "A So'th'n gentleman don't fill up his pockets when he goes out to fight. He don'

tuck his maw's Bible in his breast-pocket, clap his dear auntie's locket big as a cheese plate over his heart, nor let his sole leather cigyar case that his gyrl gave him lie round him in spots when he goes out to take another gentleman's fire. He leaves that to Yanks!"

"Did you come here to insult my husband?" said Mrs. Bunker in the rage of desperation.

"To insult yo' husband! Well — I came here to get a letter that his wife received from his political and natural enemy and — perhaps *I did!*" With a side glance at Mrs. Bunker's crimson cheek she added carelessly, "I have nothing against Captain Bunker; he 's a straightforward man and must go with his kind. He helped those hounds of Vigilantes because he believes in them. We could n't bribe him if we wanted to. And we don't."

If she only knew something of this woman's relations to Marion — which she only instinctively suspected — and could retaliate upon her, Mrs. Bunker felt she would have given up her life at that moment.

"Colonel Marion seems to find plenty that he can bribe," she said roughly, "and I 've yet to know who *you* are to sit in judgment on them. You 've got your letter, take it and go! When he wants to send you another through me, somebody else must come for it, not you. That 's all!"

She drew back as if to let the intruder pass, but the lady, without moving a muscle, finished the reading of her letter, then stood up quietly and began carefully to draw her handsome cloak over her shoulders. "Yo' want to know who I am, Mrs. Bunker," she said, arranging the velvet collar under her white oval chin. "Well, I 'm a So'th'n woman from Figinya, and I 'm Figinyan first, last, and all the time." She shook out her sleeves and the folds of her cloak. "I believe in State rights and slavery — if you know what that means. I hate the North, I hate the East, I hate the West. I hate this nigger Government. I 'd kill

that man Lincoln quicker than lightning!" She began to draw down the fingers of her gloves, holding her shapely hands upright before her. "I 'm hard and fast to the Cause. I gave up house and niggers for it." She began to button her gloves at the wrist with some difficulty, tightly setting together her beautiful lips as she did so. "I gave up my husband for it, and I went to the man who loved it better and had risked more for it than ever he had. Cunnle Marion 's my friend. I 'm Mrs. Fairfax, Josephine Hardee that was; *his* disciple and follower. Well, maybe those puritanical No'th'n folks might give it another name!"

She moved slowly towards the door, but on the threshold paused, as Colonel Marion had, and came back to Mrs. Bunker with an outstretched hand. "I don't see that yo' and me need quo'll. I did n't come here for that. I came here to see yo'r husband, and seeing *yo'* I thought it was only right to talk squarely to yo', as yo' understand I *would n't* talk to yo'r husband. Mrs. Bunker, I want yo'r husband to take me away — I want him to take me to the cunnle. If I tried to go in any other way I 'd be watched, spied upon and followed, and only lead those hounds on his track. I don't expect yo' to *ask* yo' husband for me, but only not to interfere when I do."

There was a touch of unexpected weakness in her voice and a look of pain in her eyes which was not unlike what Mrs. Bunker had seen and pitied in Marion. But they were the eyes of a woman who had humbled her, and Mrs. Bunker would have been unworthy her sex if she had not felt a cruel enjoyment in it. Yet the dominance of the stranger was still so strong that she did not dare to refuse the proffered hand. She, however, slipped the ring from her finger and laid it in Mrs. Fairfax's palm.

"You can take that with you," she said, with a desperate attempt to imitate the other's previous indifference. "I should n't like to deprive you and *your friend* of the oppor

tunity of making use of it again. As for *my* husband, I shall say nothing of you to him as long as you say nothing to him of me — which I suppose is what you mean."

The insolent look came back to Mrs. Fairfax's face. "I reckon yo' 're right," she said quietly, putting the ring in her pocket as she fixed her dark eyes on Mrs. Bunker, "and the ring may be of use again. Good-by, Mrs. Bunker."

She waved her hand carelessly, and turning away passed out of the house. A moment later the boat and its two occupants pushed from the shore, and disappeared round the Point.

Then Mrs. Bunker looked round the room, and down upon her empty finger, and knew that it was the end of her dream. It was all over now — indeed, with the picture of that proud, insolent woman before her, she wondered if it had ever begun. This was the woman she had allowed herself to think *she* might be. This was the woman *he* was thinking of when he sat there; this was the Mrs. Fairfax the officers had spoken of, and who had made her — Mrs. Bunker — the go-between for their love-making! All the work that she had done for him, the deceit she had practiced on her husband, was to bring him and this woman together! And they both knew it, and had no doubt laughed at her and her pretensions!

It was with a burning cheek that she thought how she had intended to go to Marion, and imagined herself arriving perhaps to find that shameless woman already there. In her vague unformulated longings she had never before realized the degradation into which her foolish romance might lead her. She saw it now; that humiliating moral lesson we are all apt to experience in the accidental display of our own particular vices in the person we hate, she had just felt in Mrs. Fairfax's presence. With it came the paralyzing fear of her husband's discovery of her secret.

Secure as she had been in her dull belief that he had in some way wronged her by marrying her, she for the first time began to doubt if this condoned the deceit she had practiced on him. The tribute Mrs. Fairfax had paid him — this appreciation of his integrity and honesty by an enemy and a woman like herself — troubled her, frightened her, and filled her with her first jealousy! What if this woman should tell him all; what if she should make use of him as Marion had of her! Zephas was a strong Northern partisan, but was he proof against the guileful charms of such a devil? She had never thought before of questioning his fidelity to her; she suddenly remembered now some rough pleasantries of Captain Simmons in regard to the inconstancy of his calling. No! there was but one thing for her to do: she would make a clean breast to him; she would tell him everything she had done except the fatal fancy that had compelled her to it! She began to look for his coming now with alternate hope and fear — with unabated impatience! The night that he should have arrived passed slowly; morning came, but not Zephas. When the mist had lifted she ran impatiently to the rocks and gazed anxiously towards the lower bay. There were a few gray sails scarce distinguishable above the grayer water — but they were not his. She glanced half mechanically seaward, and her eyes became suddenly fixed. There was no mistake! She knew the rig! — she could see the familiar white lap-streak as the vessel careened on the starboard tack — it was her husband's schooner slowly creeping out of the Golden Gate!

PART III

Her first wild impulse was to run to the cove, for the little dingey always moored there, and to desperately attempt to overtake him. But the swift consciousness of its

impossibility was followed by a dull, bewildering torpor, that kept her motionless, helplessly following the vessel with straining eyes, as if they could evoke some response from its decks. She was so lost in this occupation that she did not see that a pilot-boat nearly abreast of the cove had put out a two-oared gig, which was pulling quickly for the rocks. When she saw it, she trembled with the instinct that it brought her intelligence. She was right; it was a brief note from her husband, informing her that he had been hurriedly dispatched on a short sea cruise; that in order to catch the tide he had not time to go ashore at the bluff, but he would explain everything on his return. Her relief was only partial; she was already experienced enough in his vocation to know that the excuse was a feeble one. He could easily have "fetched" the bluff in tacking out of the Gate and have signaled to her to board him in her own boat. The next day she locked up her house, rowed round the Point to the Embarcadero, where the Bay steamboats occasionally touched and took up passengers to San Francisco. Captain Simmons had not seen her husband this last trip; indeed, did not know that he had gone out of the Bay. Mrs. Bunker was seized with a desperate idea. She called upon the Secretary of the Fishing Trust. That gentleman was businesslike, but neither expansive nor communicative. Her husband had *not* been ordered out to sea by them; she ought to know that Captain Bunker was now his own master, choosing his own fishing grounds, and his own times and seasons. He was not aware of any secret service for the Company in which Captain Bunker was engaged. He hoped Mrs. Bunker would distinctly remember that the little matter of the duel to which she referred was an old bygone affair, and never anything but a personal matter, in which the Fishery had no concern whatever, and in which *he* certainly should not again engage. He would advise Mrs. Bunker, if she valued her own good, and

especially her husband's, to speedily forget all about it. These were ugly times, as it was. If Mrs. Bunker's services had not been properly rewarded or considered it was certainly a great shame, but really *he* could not be expected to make it good. Certain parties had cost him trouble enough already. Besides, really, she must see that his position between her husband, whom he respected, and a certain other party was a delicate one. But Mrs. Bunker heard no more. She turned and ran down the staircase, carrying with her a burning cheek and blazing eye that somewhat startled the complacent official.

She did not remember how she got home again. She had a vague recollection of passing through the crowded streets, wondering if the people knew that she was an outcast, deserted by her husband, deceived by her ideal hero, repudiated by her friends! Men had gathered in knots before the newspaper offices, excited and gesticulating over the bulletin boards that had such strange legends as "The Crisis," "Details of an Alleged Conspiracy to Overthrow the Government," "The Assassin of Henderson to the Fore Again," "Rumored Arrests on the Mexican Frontier." Sometimes she thought she understood the drift of them; even fancied they were the outcome of her visit — as if her very presence carried treachery and suspicion with it — but generally they only struck her benumbed sense as a dull, meaningless echo of something that had happened long ago. When she reached her house, late that night, the familiar solitude of shore and sea gave her a momentary relief, but with it came the terrible conviction that she had forfeited her right to it, that when her husband came back it would be hers no longer, and that with their meeting she would know it no more. For through all her childish vacillation and imaginings she managed to cling to one steadfast resolution. She would tell him *everything*, and know the worst. Perhaps he would never come; perhaps she should not be alive to meet him.

And so the days and nights slowly passed. The solitude which her previous empty deceit had enabled her to fill with such charming visions now in her awakened remorse seemed only to protract her misery. Had she been a more experienced, though even a more guilty, woman she would have suffered less. Without sympathy or counsel, without even the faintest knowledge of the world or its standards of morality to guide her, she accepted her isolation and friendlessness as a necessary part of her wrong-doing. Her only criterion was her enemy, — Mrs. Fairfax, — and *she* could seek her relief by joining her lover; but Mrs. Bunker knew now that she herself had never had one — and was alone! Mrs. Fairfax had broken openly with her husband; but *she* had *deceived* hers, and the experience and reckoning were still to come. In her miserable confession it was not strange that this half child, half woman, sometimes looked towards that gray sea, eternally waiting for her, — that sea which had taken everything from her and given her nothing in return, — for an obliterating and perhaps exonerating death!

The third day of her waiting isolation was broken upon by another intrusion. The morning had been threatening with an opaque, motionless, livid arch above, which had taken the place of the usual flying scud and shaded cloud masses of the rainy season. The whole outlying ocean, too, beyond the bar, appeared nearer, and even seemed to be lifted higher than the Bay itself, and was lit every now and then with wonderful clearness by long flashes of breaking foam like summer lightning. She knew that this meant a southwester, and began, with a certain mechanical deliberation, to set her little domain in order against the coming gale. She drove the cows to the rude shed among the scrub oaks, she collected the goats and young kids in the corral, and replenished the stock of fuel from the woodpile. She was quite hidden in the shrubbery when she saw a

boat making slow headway against the wind towards the little cove where but a moment before she had drawn up the dingey beyond the reach of breaking seas. It was a whaleboat from Saucelito containing a few men. As they neared the landing she recognized in the man who seemed to be directing the boat the second friend of Colonel Marion — the man who had come with the Secretary to take him off, but whom she had never seen again. In her present horror of that memory she remained hidden, determined at all hazards to avoid a meeting. When they had landed, one of the men halted accidentally before the shrubbery where she was concealed, as he caught his first view of the cottage, which had been invisible from the point they had rounded.

"Look here, Bragg," he said, turning to Marion's friend, in a voice which was distinctly audible to Mrs. Bunker. "What are we to say to these people?"

"There 's only one," returned the other. "The man 's at sea. His wife 's here. She 's all right."

"You said she was one of us?"

"After a fashion. She 's the woman who helped Marion when he was here. I reckon he made it square with her from the beginning, for she forwarded letters from him since. But you can tell her as much or as little as you find necessary when you see her."

"Yes, but we must settle *now*," said Bragg sharply, "and I propose to tell her *nothing*. I 'm against having any more petticoats mixed up with our affairs. I propose to make an examination of the place without bothering our heads about her."

"But we must give some reason for coming here, and we must ask her to keep dark, or we 'll have her blabbing to the first person she meets," urged the other.

"She 's not likely to see anybody before night, when the brig will be in and the men and guns landed. Move

on, and let Jim take soundings off the cove, while I look along the shore. It 's just as well that there 's a house here, and a little cover like this "— pointing to the shrubbery — " to keep the men from making too much of a show until after the earthworks are up. There are sharp eyes over at the Fort."

" There don't seem to be any one in the house now," returned the other after a moment's scrutiny of the cottage, " or the woman would surely come at the barking of the dog, even if she had n't seen us. Likely she 's gone to Saucelito."

" So much the better. Just as well that she should know nothing until it happens. Afterwards we 'll settle with the husband for the price of possession; he has only a squatter's rights. Come along; we 'll have bad weather before we get back round the Point again, but so much the better, for it will keep off any inquisitive longshore cruisers."

They moved away. But Mrs. Bunker, stung through her benumbed and brooding consciousness, and made desperate by this repeated revelation of her former weakness, had heard enough to make her feverish to hear more. She knew the intricacies of the shrubbery thoroughly. She knew every foot of shade and cover of the clearing, and creeping like a cat from bush to bush she managed, without being discovered, to keep the party in sight and hearing all the time. It required no great discernment, even for an inexperienced woman like herself, at the end of an hour, to gather their real purpose. It was to prepare for the secret landing of an armed force, disguised as laborers, who, under the outward show of quarrying in the bluff, were to throw up breastworks, and fortify the craggy shelf. The landing was fixed for that night, and was to be effected by a vessel now cruising outside the Heads.

She understood it all now. She remembered Marion's

speech about the importance of the bluff for military purposes; she remembered the visit of the officers from the Fort opposite. The strangers were stealing a march upon the Government, and by night would be in possession. It was perhaps an evidence of her newly awakened and larger comprehension that she took no thought of her loss of home and property, — perhaps there was little to draw her to it now, — but was conscious only of a more terrible catastrophe — a catastrophe to which she was partly accessory, of which any other woman would have warned her husband — or at least those officers of the Fort whose business it was to — Ah, yes! the officers of the Fort — only just opposite to her! She trembled, and yet flushed with an inspiration. It was not too late yet — why not warn them *now?*

But how? A message sent by Saucelito and the steamboat to San Francisco — the usual way — would not reach them to-night. To go herself, rowing directly across in the dingey, would be the only security of success. If she could do it? It was a long pull — the sea was getting up — but she would try.

She waited until the last man had stepped into the boat, in nervous dread of some one remaining. Then, when the boat had vanished round the Point again, she ran back to the cottage, arrayed herself in her husband's pilot coat, hat, and boots, and launched the dingey. It was a heavy, slow, but luckily a stanch and seaworthy boat. It was not until she was well off shore that she began to feel the full fury of the wind and waves, and knew the difficulty and danger of her undertaking. She had decided that her shortest and most direct course was within a few points of the wind, but the quartering of the waves on the broad bluff bows of the boat tended to throw it to leeward, a movement that, while it retarded her forward progress, no doubt saved the little craft from swamping. Again, the

feebleness and shortness of her stroke, which never impelled her through a rising wave, but rather lifted her halfway up its face, prevented the boat from taking much water, while her steadfast gaze, fixed only on the slowly retreating shore, kept her steering free from any fatal nervous vacillation, which the sight of the threatening seas on her bow might have produced. Preserved through her very weakness, ignorance, and simplicity of purpose, the dingey had all the security of a drifting boat, yet retained a certain gentle but persistent guidance. In this feminine fashion she made enough headway to carry her abreast of the Point, where she met the reflux current sweeping round it that carried her well along into the channel, now sluggish with the turn of the tide. After half an hour's pulling, she was delighted to find herself again in a reverse current, abreast of her cottage, but steadily increasing her distance from it. She was, in fact, on the extreme outer edge of a vast whirlpool formed by the force of the gale on a curving lee shore, and was being carried to her destination in a semicircle around that bay which she never could have crossed. She was moving now in a line with the shore and the Fort, whose flagstaff, above its green square, and white quarters, she could see distinctly, and whose lower water battery and landing seemed to stretch out from the rocks scarcely a mile ahead. Protected by the shore from the fury of the wind, and even of the sea, her progress was also steadily accelerated by the velocity of the current, mingling with the ebbing tide. A sudden fear seized her. She turned the boat's head towards the shore, but it was swept quickly round again; she redoubled her exertions, tugging frantically at her helpless oars. She only succeeded in getting the boat into the trough of the sea, where, after a lurch that threatened to capsize it, it providentially swung around on its short keel and began to drift stern on. She was almost abreast of the battery now; she could hear the fitful

notes of a bugle that seemed blown and scattered above her head; she even thought she could see some men in blue uniforms moving along the little pier. She was passing it; another fruitless effort to regain her ground, but she was swept along steadily towards the Gate, the whitening bar, and the open sea.

She knew now what it all meant. This was what she had come for; this was the end! Beyond, only a little beyond, just a few moments longer to wait, and then, out there among the breakers was the rest that she had longed for but had not dared to seek. It was not her fault; they could not blame *her*. He would come back and never know what had happened — nor even know how she had tried to atone for her deceit. And he would find his house in possession of — of — those devils! No! No! she must not die yet, at least not until she had warned the Fort. She seized the oars again with frenzied strength; the boat had stopped under the wonted strain, staggered, tried to rise in an uplifted sea, took part of it over her bow, struck down Mrs. Bunker under half a ton of blue water that wrested the oars from her paralyzed hands like playthings, swept them over the gunwale, and left her lying senseless in the bottom of the boat.

. . . . . .

"Hold har-rd — or you 'll run her down."

"Now then, Riley, — look alive, — is it slapin' ye are!"

"Hold yer jaw, Flanigan, and stand ready with the boat-hook. Now then, hold har-rd!"

The sudden jarring and tilting of the water-logged boat, a sound of rasping timbers, the swarming of men in shirt-sleeves and blue trousers around her, seemed to rouse her momentarily, but she again fainted away.

When she struggled back to consciousness once more she was wrapped in a soldier's jacket, her head pillowed on the

shirtsleeve of an artillery corporal in the stern-sheets of that eight-oared Government barge she had remembered. But the only officer was a bareheaded, boyish lieutenant, and the rowers were an athletic but unseaman-like crew of mingled artillerymen and infantry.

"And where did ye drift from, darlint?"

Mrs. Bunker bridled feebly at the epithet.

"I did n't drift. I was going to the Fort."

"The Fort, is it?"

"Yes. I want to see the general."

"Wad n't the liftenant do ye? Or shure there 's the adjutant; he 's a foine man."

"Silence, Flanigan," said the young officer sharply. Then turning to Mrs. Bunker he said, "Don't mind *him*, but let his wife take you to the canteen, when we get in, and get you some dry clothes."

But Mrs. Bunker, spurred to convalescence at the indignity, protested stiffly, and demanded on her arrival to be led at once to the general's quarters. A few officers, who had been attracted to the pier by the rescue, acceded to her demand.

She recognized the gray-haired, handsome man who had come ashore at her house. With a touch of indignation at her treatment, she briefly told her story. But the general listened coldly and gravely with his eyes fixed upon her face.

"You say you recognized in the leader of the party a man you had seen before. Under what circumstances?"

Mrs. Bunker hesitated with burning cheeks. "He came to take Colonel Marion from our place."

"When you were hiding him, — yes, we 've heard the story. Now, Mrs. Bunker, may I ask you what you, as a Southern sympathizer, expect to gain by telling me this story?"

But here Mrs. Bunker burst out. "I am not a Southern

sympathizer! Never! Never! Never! I 'm a Union woman, — wife of a Northern man. I helped that man before I knew who he was. Any Christian, Northerner or Southerner, would have done the same!"

Her sincerity and passion were equally unmistakable. The general rose, opened the door of the adjoining room, said a few words to an orderly on duty, and returned. "What you are asking of me, Mrs. Bunker, is almost as extravagant and unprecedented as your story. You must understand, as well as your husband, that if I land a force on your property it will be to *take possession* of it in the name of the Government, for Government purposes."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Bunker eagerly; "I know that. I am willing; Zephas will be willing."

"And," continued the general, fixing his eyes on her face, "you will also understand that I may be compelled to detain you here as a hostage for the safety of my men."

"Oh no! no! please!" said Mrs Bunker, springing up with an imploring feminine gesture; "I am expecting my husband. He may be coming back at any moment; I must be there to see him *first!* Please let me go back, sir, with your men; put me anywhere ashore between them and those men that are coming. Lock me up; keep me a prisoner in my own home; do anything else if you think I am deceiving you; but don't keep me here to miss him when he comes!"

"But you can see him later," said the general.

"But I must see him *first*," said Mrs. Bunker desperately. "I must see him first, for — for — *he knows nothing of this.* He knows nothing of my helping Colonel Marion; he knows nothing of — how foolish I have been, and — he must not know it from others! There!" It was out at last. She was sobbing now, but her pride was gone. She felt relieved, and did not even notice the presence of two or three other officers, who had entered the room, exchanged a

few hurried words with their superior, and were gazing at her in astonishment.

The general's brow relaxed, and he smiled. "Very well, Mrs. Bunker; it shall be as you like, then. You shall go and meet your husband with Captain Jennings here," — indicating one of the officers, — "who will take charge of you and the party."

"And," said Mrs. Bunker, looking imploringly through her wet but pretty lashes at the officer, "he won't say anything to Zephas, either?"

"Not a syllable," said Captain Jennings gravely. "But while the tug is getting ready, general, had n't Mrs. Bunker better go to Mrs. Flanigan?"

"I think not," said the general, with a significant look at the officer, as he gallantly offered his arm to the astonished Mrs. Bunker, "if she will allow me the pleasure of taking her to my wife."

There was an equally marked respect in the manner of the men and officers as Mrs. Bunker finally stepped on board the steam tug that was to convey the party across the turbulent bay. But she heeded it not, neither did she take any concern of the still furious gale, the difficult landing, the preternatural activity of the band of sappers, who seemed to work magic with their picks and shovels, the shelter tents that arose swiftly around her, the sheds and bush inclosures that were evoked from the very ground beneath her feet; the wonderful skill, order, and discipline that in a few hours converted her straggling dominion into a formal camp, even to the sentinel, who was already calmly pacing the rocks by the landing as if he had been doing it for years! Only one thing thrilled her — the sudden outburst, fluttering and snapping of the national flag from her little flagstaff. He would see it — and perhaps be pleased!

And indeed it seemed as if the men had caught the in-

fection of her anxiety, for when her strained eyes could no longer pierce the murky twilight settling over the Gate, one came running to her to say that the lookout had just discovered through his glass a close-reefed schooner running in before the wind. It was her husband, and scarcely an hour after night had shut in, the schooner had rounded to, off the Point, dropped her boat, and sped away to anchorage. And then Mrs. Bunker, running bareheaded down the rocks, breaking in upon the hurried explanation of the officer of the guard, threw herself upon her husband's breast, and sobbed and laughed as if her heart would break!

Nor did she scarcely hear his hurried comment to the officer and unconscious corroboration of her story: how a brig had raced them from the Gate, was heading for the bar, but suddenly sheered off and put away to sea again, as if from some signal from the headland. "Yes — the bluff," interrupted Captain Jennings bitterly, "I thought of that, but the old man said it was more diplomatic just now to *prevent* an attempt than even to successfully resist it."

But when they were alone again in their little cottage, and Zephas's honest eyes — with no trace of evil knowledge or suspicion in their homely, neutral lightness — were looking into hers with his usual simple trustfulness, Mrs. Bunker trembled, whimpered, and — I grieve to say — basely funked her boasted confession. But here the Deity which protects feminine weakness intervened with the usual miracle. As he gazed at his wife's troubled face, an apologetic cloud came over his rugged but open brow, and a smile of awkward deprecating embarrassment suffused his eyes. "I declare to goodness, Mollie, but I must tell you suthin', although I guess I did n't kalkilate to say a word about it. But, darn it all, I can't keep it in. No! Lookin' inter that innercent face o' yourn" — pressing her flushing cheeks between his cool brown hands — "and

gazing inter them two truthful eyes" — they blinked at this moment with a divine modesty — "and thinkin' of what you 've just did for your kentry — like them Revolutionary women o' '76 — I feel like a darned swab of a traitor myself. Well! what I want ter tell you is this: Ye know, or ye 've heard me tell o' that Mrs. Fairfax, as left her husband for that fire-eatin' Marion, and stuck to him through thick and thin, and stood watch and watch with him in this howlin' Southern rumpus they 're kickin' up all along the coast, as if she was a man herself. Well, jes as I hauled up at the wharf at 'Frisco, she comes aboard.

"'You 're Cap Bunker?' she says.

"'That 's me, ma'am,' I says.

"'You 're a Northern man and you go with your kind,' sez she; 'but you 're a white man, and thar 's no cur blood in you.' But you ain't listenin', Mollie; you 're dead tired, lass," — with a commiserating look at her now whitening face, — "and I 'll haul in line and wait. Well, to cut it short, she wanted me to take her down the coast a bit to where she could join Marion. She said she 'd been shook by his friends, followed by spies — and, blame my skin, Mollie, ef that proud woman did n't break down and *cry* like a baby. Now, Mollie, what got *me* in all this, was that them Chivalry folks — ez was always jawin' about their 'Southern dames' and their 'Ladye fairs,' and always runnin' that kind of bilge water outer their scuppers whenever they careened over on a fair wind — was jes the kind to throw off on a woman when they did n't want her, and I kinder thought I 'd like *her* to see the difference betwixt the latitude o' Charleston and Cape Cod. So I told her I did n't want the jewelry and dimons she offered me, but if she would come down to the wharf, after dark, I 'd smuggle her aboard, and I 'd allow to the men that she was *your auntie* ez I was givin' a free pas-

sage to! Lord! dear! think o' me takin' the name o' Mollie Bunker's aunt in vain for that sort o' woman! Think o' me," continued Captain Bunker, with a tentative chuckle, "sort o' pretendin' to hand yo'r auntie to Kernel Marion for — for his lady-love! I don't wonder ye's half frighted and half laffin'," he added, as his wife uttered a hysterical cry; "it *was* awful! But it worked, and I got her off, and wot 's more I got her shipped to Mazatlan, where she 'll join Marion, and the two are goin' back to Virginy, where I guess they won't trouble Californy again. Ye know now, deary," he went on, speaking with difficulty through Mrs. Bunker's clinging arms and fast dripping tears, "why I did n't heave to to say 'good-by.' But it's all over now — I've made a clean breast of it, Mollie — and don't you cry!"

But it was *not* all over. For a moment later Captain Bunker began to fumble in his waistcoat pocket with the one hand that was not clasping his wife's waist. "One thing more, Mollie; when I left her and refused to take any of her dimons, she put a queer sort o' ring into my hand, and told me with a kind o' mischievous, bedevilin' smile, that I must keep it to remember her by. Here it is — why, Mollie lass! are you crazy?"

She had snatched it from his fingers and was running swiftly from the cottage out into the tempestuous night. He followed closely, until she reached the edge of the rocks. And only then, in the struggling, fast-flying moonlight, she raised a passionate hand, and threw it far into the sea!

As he led her back to the cottage she said she was jealous, and honest Captain Bunker, with his arm around her, felt himself the happiest man in the world!

. . . . . .

From that day the flag flew regularly over the rocky shelf, and, in time, bugles and morning drumbeats were

wafted from it to the decks of passing ships. For the Federal Government had adjudged the land for its own use, paid Captain Bunker a handsome sum for its possession, and had discreetly hidden the little cottage of Mrs. Bunker and its history forever behind bastion and casemate.

THE SHERIFF OF SISKYOU

I

On the 15th of August, 1854, what seemed to be the entire population of Wynyard's Bar was collected upon a little bluff which overlooked the rude wagon road that was the only approach to the settlement. In general appearance the men differed but little from ordinary miners, although the foreign element, shown in certain Spanish peculiarities of dress and color, predominated, and some of the men were further distinguished by the delicacy of education and sedentary pursuits. Yet Wynyard's Bar was a city of refuge, comprised among its inhabitants a number who were "wanted" by the State authorities, and its actual attitude at that moment was one of open rebellion against the legal power, and of particular resistance to the apprehension by warrant of one of its prominent members. This gentleman, Major Overstone, then astride of a gray mustang, and directing the movements of the crowd, had, a few days before, killed the sheriff of Siskyou County, who had attempted to arrest him for the double offense of misappropriating certain corporate funds of the State and the shooting of the editor who had imprudently exposed him. The lesser crime of homicide might have been overlooked by the authorities, but its repetition upon the body of their own over-zealous and misguided official could not pass unchallenged if they expected to arrest Overstone for the more serious offense against property. So it was known that a new sheriff had been appointed and was coming to Wynyard's Bar with an

armed posse. But it was also understood that this invasion would be resisted by the Bar to its last man.

All eyes were turned upon a fringe of laurel and butternut that encroached upon the road half a mile away, where it seemed that such of the inhabitants who were missing from the bluff were hidden to give warning or retard the approach of the posse. A gray haze, slowly rising between the fringe and the distant hillside, was recognized as the dust of a cavalcade passing along the invisible highway. In the hush of expectancy that followed, the irregular clatter of hoofs, the sharp crack of a rifle, and a sudden halt were faintly audible. The men, scattered in groups on the bluff, exchanged a smile of grim satisfaction.

Not so their leader! A quick start and an oath attracted attention to him. To their surprise he was looking in another direction, but as they looked too they saw and understood the cause. A file of horsemen, hitherto undetected, were slowly passing along the little ridge on their right. Their compact accoutrements and the yellow braid on their blue jackets, distinctly seen at that distance, showed them to be a detachment of United States cavalry.

Before the assemblage could realize this new invasion a nearer clatter of hoofs was heard along the highroad, and one of the ambuscading party dashed up from the fringe of woods below. His face was flushed, but triumphant.

"A reg'lar skunk — by the living hokey!" he panted, pointing to the faint haze that was again slowly rising above the invisible road. "They backed down as soon as they saw our hand, and got a hole through their new sheriff's hat. But what are you lookin' at? What 's up?"

The leader impatiently pointed with a darkening face to the distant file.

"Reg'lars, by Gum!" ejaculated the other. "But Uncle Sam ain't in this game. Wot right have *they*" —

"Dry up!" said the leader.

The detachment was now moving at right angles with the camp, but suddenly halted, almost doubling upon itself in some evident commotion. A dismounted figure was seen momentarily flying down the hillside dodging from bush to bush until lost in the underbrush. A dozen shots were fired over its head, and then the whole detachment wheeled and came clattering down the trail in the direction of the camp. A single riderless horse, evidently that of the fugitive, followed.

"Spread yourselves along the ridge, every man of you, and cover them as they enter the gulch!" shouted the leader. "But not a shot until I give the word. Scatter!"

The assemblage dispersed like a startled village of prairie-dogs, squatting behind every available bush and rock along the line of bluff. The leader alone trotted quietly to the head of the gulch.

The nine cavalrymen came smartly up in twos, a young officer leading. The single figure of Major Overstone opposed them with a command to halt. Looking up, the young officer drew rein, said a word to his file leader, and the four files closed in a compact square motionless on the road. The young officer's unsworded hand hung quietly at his thigh, the men's unslung carbines rested easily on their saddles. Yet at that moment every man of them knew that they were covered by a hundred rifles and shot-guns leveled from every bush, and that they were caught helplessly in a trap.

"Since when," said Major Overstone, with an affectation of tone and manner different from that in which he had addressed his previous companions, "have the Ninth United States Cavalry helped to serve a State court's pettifogging process?"

"We are hunting a deserter — a half-breed agent — who has just escaped us," returned the officer. His voice was boyish — so, too, was his figure in its slim, cadet-like smart-

ness of belted tunic — but very quiet and level, although his face was still flushed with the shock and shame of his surprise.

The relaxation of relief went through the wrought and waiting camp. The soldiers were not seeking *them*. Ready as these desperate men had been to do their leader's bidding, they were well aware that a momentary victory over the troopers would not pass unpunished, and meant the ultimate dispersion of the camp. And quiet as these innocent invaders seemed to be they would no doubt sell their lives dearly. The embattled desperadoes glanced anxiously at their leader; the soldiers, on the contrary, looked straight before them.

"Process or no process," said Major Overstone, with a sneer, "you 've come to the last place to recover your deserter. We don't give up men in Wynyard's Bar. And they did n't teach you at the Academy, sir, to stop to take prisoners when you were outflanked and outnumbered."

"Bedad! They did n't teach *you*, Captain Overstone, to engage a battery at Cerro Gordo with a half company, but you did it; more shame to you now, sorr, commandin' the thayves and ruffians you do."

"Silence!" said the young officer.

The sleeve of the sergeant who had spoken — with the chevrons of long service upon it — went up to a salute, and dropped again over his carbine as he stared stolidly before him. But his shot had told. A flush of mingled pride and shame passed over Overstone's face.

"Oh! it 's *you*, Murphy," he said, with an affected laugh, "and you have n't improved with your stripes."

The young officer turned his head slightly.

"Attention!"

"One moment more," said Overstone, coming forward. "I have told you that we don't give up any man who seeks our protection. But," he added, with a half-careless, half-

contemptuous wave of his hand, a significant glance at his followers, "we don't prevent you from seeking him. The road is clear; the camp is before you."

The young officer continued without looking at him. "Forward — in two files — open order. Ma-arch!"

The little troop moved forward, passed Major Overstone at the head of the gully, and spread out on the hillside. The assembled camp, still armed, lounging out of ambush here and there, ironically made way for them to pass. A few moments of this farcical quest, and a glance at the impenetrably wooded heights around, apparently satisfied the young officer, and he turned his files again into the gully. Major Overstone was still lingering there.

"I hope you are satisfied," he said grimly. He then paused, and in a changed and more hesitating voice added: "I am an older soldier than you, sir, but I am always glad to make the acquaintance of West Point." He paused and held out his hand.

West Point, still red and rigid, glanced at him with bright clear eyes under light lashes and the peak of a smartly cocked cap, looked coolly at the proffered hand, raised his own to a stiff salute, said, "Good-afternoon, sir," and rode away.

Major Overstone wheeled angrily, but in doing so came sharply upon his coadjutor — the leader of the ambushed party.

"Well, Dawson," he said impatiently. "Who was it?"

"Only one of them d—d half-breed Injin agents. He's just over there in the brush with Simpson, lying low till the soldiers clear out."

"Did you talk to him?"

"Not much!" returned Dawson scornfully. "He ain't my style."

"Fetch him up to my cabin; he may be of some use to us."

Dawson looked skeptical. "I reckon he ain't no more gain here than he was over there," he said, and turned away.

II

The cabin of Major Overstone differed outwardly but little from those of his companions. It was the usual structure of logs, laid lengthwise, and rudely plastered at each point of contact with adobe, the material from which the chimney, which entirely occupied one gable, was built. It was pierced with two windows and a door, roofed with smaller logs, and thatched with long half cylinders of spruce bark. But the interior gave certain indications of the distinction as well as the peculiar experiences of its occupant. In place of the usual bunk or berth built against the wall stood a small folding camp bedstead, and upon a rude deal table that held a tin wash-basin and pail lay two ivory-handled brushes, combs, and other elegant toilet articles, evidently the contents of the major's dressing-bag. A handsome leather trunk occupied one corner, with a richly caparisoned silver-mounted Mexican saddle, a mahogany case of dueling pistols, a leather hat-box, locked and strapped, and a gorgeous gold-and-quartz-handled ebony "presentation" walking-stick. There was a certain dramatic suggestion in this revelation of the sudden and hurried transition from a life of ostentatious luxury to one of hidden toil and privation, and a further significance in the slow and gradual distribution and degradation of these elegant souvenirs. A pair of silver boot-hooks had been used for raking the hearth and lifting the coffee kettle; the ivory of the brushes was stained with coffee; the cut-glass bottles had lost their stoppers, and had been utilized for vinegar and salt; a silver-framed hand mirror hung against the blackened wall. For the major's occupancy was the sequel of a hurried flight from his luxurious hotel at Sacramento — a transfer that he

believed was only temporary until the affair blew over, and he could return in safety to browbeat his accusers, as was his wont. But this had not been so easy as he had imagined; his prosecutors were bitter, and his enforced seclusion had been prolonged week by week until the fracas which ended in the shooting of the sheriff had apparently closed the door upon his return to civilization forever. Only here was his life and person secure. For Wynyard's Bar had quickly succumbed to the domination of his reckless courage, and the eminence of his double crime had made him respected among spendthrifts, gamblers, and gentlemen whose performances had never risen above a stagecoach robbery or a single assassination. Even criticism of his faded luxuries had been delicately withheld.

He was leaning over his open trunk — which the camp popularly supposed to contain State bonds and securities of fabulous amount — and had taken some letters from it, when a figure darkened the doorway. He looked up, laying his papers carelessly aside. *Within* Wynyard's Bar property was sacred.

It was the late fugitive. Although some hours had already elapsed since his arrival in camp, and he had presumably refreshed himself inwardly, his outward appearance was still disheveled and dusty. Brier and milkweed clung to his frayed blouse and trousers. What could be seen of the skin of his face and hands under its stains and begriming was of a dull yellow. His light eyes had all the brightness without the restlessness of the mongrel race. They leisurely took in the whole cabin, the still open trunk before the major, and then rested deliberately on the major himself.

"Well," said Major Overstone abruptly, "what brought you here?"

"Same as brought you, I reckon," responded the man, almost as abruptly.

The major knew something of the half-breed temper, and neither the retort nor its tone affected him.

"You did n't come here just because you deserted," said the major coolly. "You 've been up to something else."

"I have," said the man, with equal coolness.

"I thought so. Now, you understand you can't try anything of that kind *here*. If you do, up you go on the first tree. That 's Rule 1."

"I see you ain't pertickler about waiting for the sheriff here, you fellers."

The major glanced at him quickly. He seemed to be quite unconscious of any irony in his remark, and continued grimly, "And what 's Rule 2?"

"I reckon you need n't trouble yourself beyond No. 1," returned the major, with dry significance. Nevertheless, he opened a rude cupboard in the corner and brought out a rich silver-mounted cut-glass drinking-flask, which he handed to the stranger.

"I say," said the half-breed admiringly, "yours?"

"Certainly."

"Certainly *now*, but *before*, eh?"

Rule No. 2 may have indicated that references to the past held no dishonor. The major, although accustomed to these pleasantries, laughed a little harshly.

"Mine always," he said. "But you don't drink?"

The half-breed's face darkened under its grime.

"Wot you 're givin' us? I 've been filled chock up by Simpson over thar. I reckon I know when I 've got a load on."

"Were you ever in Sacramento?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last week."

"Did you hear anything about me?"

The half-breed glanced through his tangled hair at the

major in some wonder, not only at the question, but at the almost childish eagerness with which it was asked.

"I did n't hear much of anything else," he answered grimly.

"And — what did they *say?*"

"Said you 'd got to be *took* anyhow! They allowed the new sheriff would do it too."

The major laughed. "Well, you heard *how* the new sheriff did it — skunked away with his whole posse before one eighth of my men! You saw how the rest of this camp held up your nine troopers, and that sap-headed cub of a lieutenant — did n't you? You would n't have been standing here if you had n't. No; there is n't the civil process nor the civil power in all California that can take me out of this camp."

But neither his previous curiosity nor present bravado seemed to impress the ragged stranger with much favor. He glanced sulkily around the cabin and began to shuffle towards the door.

"Stop! Where are you going to? Sit down. I want to talk to you."

The fugitive hesitated for a moment, and then dropped ungraciously on the edge of a camp-stool near the door. The major looked at him.

"I may have to remind you that *I* run this camp, and the boys hereabouts do pretty much as *I* say. What 's your name?"

"Tom."

"Tom? Well, look here, Tom! D—n it all! Can't you see that when a man is stuck here alone, as I am, he wants to know what 's going on outside, and hear a little fresh talk?"

The singular weakness of this blended command and appeal apparently struck the fugitive curiously. He fixed his lowering eyes on the major as if in gloomy doubt if he

were really the reckless desperado he had been represented. That this man — twice an assassin and the ruler of outlaws as reckless as himself — should approach him in this half-confidential way evidently puzzled him.

"Wot you wanter know?" he asked gruffly.

"Well, what's my party saying or doing about me?" said the major impatiently. "What's the 'Express' saying about me?"

"I reckon they're throwing off on you all round; they allow you never represented the party, but worked for yourself," said the man shortly.

Here the major lashed out. A set of traitors and hirelings! He had bought and paid for them all! He had sunk two thousand dollars in the "Express" and saved the editor from being horsewhipped and jailed for libel! Half the cursed bonds that they were making such a blanked fuss about were handled by these hypocrites — blank them! They were a low-lived crew of thieves and deserters! It is presumed that the major had forgotten himself in this infelicitous selection of epithets, but the stranger's face only relaxed into a grim smile. More than that, the major had apparently forgotten his desire to hear his guest talk, for he himself at once launched into an elaborate exposition of his own affairs and a specious and equally elaborate defense and justification of himself and denunciation of his accusers. For nearly half an hour he reviewed step by step and detail by detail the charges against him — with plausible explanation and sophistical argument, but always with a singular prolixity and reiteration that spoke of incessant self-consciousness and self-abstraction. Of that dashing self-sufficiency which had dazzled his friends and awed his enemies there was no trace! At last, even the set smile of the degraded recipient of these confidences darkened with a dull, bewildered disgust. Then, to his relief, a step was heard without. The major's manner instantly changed.

"Well?" he demanded impatiently, as Dawson entered.

"I came to know what you want done with *him*," said Dawson, indicating the fugitive with a contemptuous finger.

"Take him to your cabin!"

"My cabin! *him?*" ejaculated Dawson, turning sharply on his chief.

The major's light eyes contracted and his thin lips became a straight line. "I don't think you understand me, Dawson, and another time you'd better wait until I'm done. I want you to take him to your cabin — and then *clear out of it yourself*. You understand? I want him *near me* and *alone!*"

III

Dawson was not astonished the next morning to see Major Overstone and the half-breed walking together down the gully road, for he had already come to the conclusion that the major was planning some extraordinary reprisals against the invaders, that would insure the perpetual security of the camp. That he should use so insignificant and unimportant a tool now appeared to him to be quite natural, particularly as the service was probably one in which the man would be sacrificed. "The major," he suggested to his companions, "ain't going to risk a white man's skin, when he can get an Injun's hide handy."

The reluctant hesitating step of the half-breed as they walked along seemed to give some color to this hypothesis. He listened sullenly to the major as he pointed out the strategic position of the Bar. "That wagon road is the only approach to Wynyard's, and a dozen men along the rocks could hold it against a hundred. The trail that you came by, over the ridge, drops straight into this gully, and you saw what that would mean to any blanked fools who might try

it. Of course we could be shelled from that ridge if the sheriff had a howitzer, or the men who knew how to work one, but even then we could occupy the ridge before them." He paused a moment and then added: "I used to be in the army, Tom; I saw service in Mexico before that cub you got away from had his first trousers. I was brought up as a gentleman — blank it all — and *here* I am!"

The man slouched on by his side, casting his surly, furtive glances from left to right, as if seeking to escape from these confidences. Nevertheless, the major kept on through the gully, until reaching the wagon road they crossed it, and began to ascend the opposite slope, half hidden by the underbrush and larches. Here the major paused again and faced about. The cabins of the settlement were already behind the bluff; the little stream which indicated the "bar" — on which some perfunctory mining was still continued — now and then rang out quite clearly at their feet, although the bar itself had disappeared. The sounds of occupation and labor had at last died away in the distance. They were quite alone. The major sat down on a boulder, and pointed to another. The man, however, remained sullenly standing where he was, as if to accent as strongly as possible the enforced companionship. Either the major was too self-absorbed to notice it, or accepted it as a satisfactory characteristic of the half-breed's race. He continued confidently: —

"Now look here, Tom. I want to leave this cursed hole, and get clear out of the State! Anywhere; over the Oregon line into British Columbia, or the coast, where I can get a coasting-vessel down to Mexico. It will cost money, but I 've got it. It will cost a lot of risks, but I 'll take them. I want somebody to help me, some one to share risks with me, and some one to share my luck if I succeed. Help to put me on the other side of the border line, by sea or land, and I 'll give you a thousand dollars

down *before we start* and a thousand dollars when I 'm safe."

The half-breed had changed his slouching attitude. It seemed more indolent on account of the loosely hanging strap that had once held his haversack, which was still worn in a slovenly fashion over his shoulder as a kind of lazy sling for his shiftless hand.

"Well, Tom, is it a go? You can trust *me*, for you 'll have the thousand in your pocket before you start. I can trust *you*, for I 'll kill you quicker than lightning if you say a word of this to any one before I go, or play a single trick on me afterwards."

Suddenly the two men were rolling over and over in the underbrush. The half-breed had thrown himself upon the major bearing him down to the ground. The haversack strap for an instant whirled like the loop of a lasso in the air, and descended over the major's shoulders, pinioning his arms to his side. Then the half-breed, tearing open his ragged blouse, stripped off his waist-belt, and as dexterously slipped it over the ankles of the struggling man.

It was all over in a moment. Neither had spoken a word. Only their rapid panting broke the profound silence. Each probably knew that no outcry would be overheard.

For the first time the half-breed sat down. But there was no trace of triumph or satisfaction in his face, which wore the same lowering look of disgust, as he gazed upon the prostrate man.

"I want to tell you first," he said, slowly wiping his face, "that I did n't kalkilate upon doin' this in this yer kind o' way. I expected more of a stan'-up fight from you — more risk in gettin' you out o' that hole — and a different kind of a man to tackle. I never expected you to play into my hand like this — and it goes against me to hev to take advantage of it."

"Who are you?" said the major pantingly.

"I'm the new sheriff of Siskyou!"

He drew from beneath his begrimed shirt a paper wrapping, from which he gingerly extracted with the ends of his dirty fingers a clean, legal-looking folded paper.

"That's my warrant! I've kept it fresh for you. I reckon you don't care to read it — you've seen it afore. It's just the same as t'other sheriff had — what you shot."

"Then this is a plant of yours, and that whelp's troopers?" said the major.

"Neither him nor the sojers knows any more about it than you," returned the sheriff slowly. "I enlisted as Injin guide or scout ten days ago. I deserted just as reg'lar and nat'ral like when we passed that ridge yesterday. I could be took to-morrow by the sojers if they caught sight o' me, and court-martialed — it's as reg'lar as *that!* But I timed to have my posse, under a deputy, draw you off by an attack just as the escort reached the ridge. And here I am."

"And you're no half-breed?"

"There's nothin' Injin about me that water won't wash off. I kalkilated you would n't suspect anything so insignificant as an *Injin*, when I fixed myself up. You saw Dawson did n't hanker after me much. But I did n't reckon on *your* tumbling to me so quick. That's what gets me! You must hev been pretty low down for kempany when you took a man like me inter your confidence. I don't see it yet."

He looked inquiringly at his captive — with the same wondering surliness. Nor could he understand another thing which was evident. After the first shock of resistance the major had exhibited none of the indignation of a betrayed man, but actually seemed to accept the situation with a calmness that his captor lacked. His voice was quite unemotional as he said: —

"And how are you going to get me away from here?"

"That's *my* look-out, and need n't trouble you, major; but, seein' as how confidential you've been to me, I don't mind tellin' you. Last night that posse of mine that you 'skunked,' you know, halted at the cross roads till them sojers went by. They has only to *see them* to know that *I* had got away. They 'll hang round the cross roads till they see my signal on top of the ridge, and then they 'll make another show against that pass. Your men will have their hands full, I reckon, without huntin' for *you*, or noticin' the three men o' mine that will come along this ridge where the sojers come yesterday — to help me get you down in the same way. You see, major, your little trap in that gully ain't in this fight — *we're the other side of it.* I ain't much of a sojer, but I reckon I've got you there! And it's all owing to *you.* I ain't," he added gloomily, "takin' much pride in it *myself.*"

"I should n't think you would," said the major, "and look here! I'll double that offer I made you just now. Set me down just as I am on the deck of some coasting-vessel, and I'll pay you four thousand dollars. You may have all the glory of having captured me, *here*, and of making your word good before your posse. But you can arrange afterwards on the way to let me give you the slip somewhere near Sacramento."

The sheriff's face actually brightened. "Thanks for that, major. I was gettin' a little sick of my share in this job, but, by God! you've put some sand in me. Well, then! there ain't gold enough in all Californy to make me let you go. You hear me; so drop that. I've *took* you, and *took* ye 'll remain until I land you in Sacramento jail. I don't want to kill you, though your life 's forfeit a dozen times over, and I reckon you don't care for it either way, but if you try any tricks on me, I may have to *maim* ye to make you come along comf'able and easy. I ain't hankerin' arter *that* either, but come you shall!"

"Give your signal and have an end of this," said the major curtly.

The sheriff looked at him again curiously. "I never had my hands in another man's pockets before, major, but I reckon I'll have to take your derringers from yours." He slipped his hand into the major's waistcoat and secured the weapons. "I'll have to trouble you for your sash, too," he said, unwinding the knitted silken girdle from the captive's waist. "You won't want it, for you ain't walking, and it'll come in handy to me just now."

He bent over, and, passing it across the major's breast with more gentleness and solicitude than he had yet shown, secured him in an easy sitting posture against a tree. Then, after carefully trying the knots and straps that held his prisoner, he turned and lightly bounded up the hill.

He was absent scarcely ten minutes, yet when he returned the major's eyes were half closed. But not his lips. "If you expect to hold me until your posse comes you had better take me to some less exposed position," he said dryly. "There's a man just crossed the gully, coming into the brush below in the wood."

"None of your tricks, major!"

"Look for yourself."

The sheriff glanced quickly below him. A man with an axe on his shoulder could be seen plainly making his way through the underbrush not a hundred yards away. The sheriff instantly clapped his hand upon his captive's mouth, but at a look from his eyes took it away again.

"I see," he said grimly, "you don't want to lure that man within reach of my revolver by calling to him."

"I could have called him while you were away," returned the major quietly.

The sheriff with a darkened face loosened the sash that bound his prisoner to the tree, and then, lifting him in his arms, began to ascend the hill cautiously, dipping into the

heavier shadows. But the ascent was difficult, the load a heavy one, and the sheriff was agile rather than muscular. After a few minutes' climbing he was forced to pause and rest his burden at the foot of a tree. But the valley and the man in the underbrush were no longer in view.

"Come," said the major quietly, "unstrap my ankles and I 'll *walk* up. We 'll never get there at this rate."

The sheriff paused, wiped his grimy face with his grimier blouse, and stood looking at his prisoner. Then he said slowly : —

"Look yer! Wot 's your little game? Blessed if I kin follow suit."

For the first time the major burst into a rage. "Blast it all! Don't you see that if I 'm discovered *here*, in this way, there 's not a man on the Bar who would believe that I walked into your trap, not a man, by God! who would n' think it was a trick of yours and mine together? "

"Or," interrupted the sheriff slowly, fixing his eyes on his prisoner, "not a man who would ever trust Major Overstone for a leader again? "

"Perhaps," said the major, unmovedly, again, "I don't think *either of us* would ever get a chance of being trusted again by any one."

The sheriff still kept his eyes fixed on his prisoner, his gloomy face growing darker under its grime. "*That* ain't the reason, major. Life and death don't mean much more to you than they do to me in this yer game. *I* know that you 'd kill me quicker nor lightning if you got the chance; *you* know that I 'm takin' you to the gallows."

"The reason is that I want to leave Wynyard's Bar," said the major coolly; "and even this way out of it will suit me."

The sheriff took his revolver from his pocket and deliberately cocked it. Then, leaning down, he unbuckled the strap from the major's ankles. A wild hope that his

incomprehensible captive might seize that moment to develop his real intent — that he might fly, fight, or in some way act up to his reckless reputation — sustained him for a moment, but in the next proved futile. The major only said, "Thank you, Tom," and stretched his cramped legs.

"Get up and go on," said the sheriff roughly.

The major began to slowly ascend the hill, the sheriff close on his heels, alert, tingling, and watchful of every movement. For a few moments this strain upon his faculties seemed to invigorate him, and his gloom relaxed, but presently it became too evident that the prisoner's pinioned arms made it impossible for him to balance or help himself on that steep trail, and once or twice he stumbled and reeled dangerously to one side. With an oath the sheriff caught him, and tore from his arms the only remaining bonds that fettered him. "There!" he said savagely; "go on; we 're equal!"

Without replying, the major continued his ascent; it became steeper as they neared the crest, and at last they were both obliged to drag themselves up by clutching the vines and underbrush. Suddenly the major stopped with a listening gesture. A strange roaring — as of wind or water — was distinctly audible.

"How did you signal?" asked the major abruptly.

"Made a smoke," said the sheriff as abruptly.

"I thought so — well! you 've set the woods on fire."

They both plunged upwards again, now quite abreast, vying with each other to reach the summit as if with the one thought only. Already the sting and smart of acrid fumes were in their eyes and nostrils; when they at last stood on level ground again, it was hidden by a thin film of grayish-blue haze that seemed to be creeping along it. But above was the clear sky, seen through the interlacing boughs, and to their surprise — they who had just come from the breathless, stagnant hillside — a fierce wind was blowing! But the roaring was louder than before.

"Unless your three men are already here, your game is up," said the major calmly. "The wind blows dead along the ridge where they should come, and they can't get through the smoke and fire."

It was indeed true! In the scarce twenty minutes that had elapsed since the sheriff's return, the dry and brittle underbrush for half a mile on either side had been converted into a sheet of flame, which at times rose to a furnace blast through the tall chimney-like conductors of tree shafts, from whose shriveled sides bark was crackling, and lighted dead limbs falling in all directions. The whole valley, the gully, the Bar, the very hillside they had just left, were blotted out by a creeping, stifling smoke-fog that scarcely rose breast high, but was beaten down or cut off cleanly by the violent wind that swept the higher level of the forest. At times this gale became a sirocco in temperature, concentrating its heat in withering blasts which they could not face, or focusing its intensity upon some mass of foliage that seemed to shrink at its touch and open a scathed and quivering aisle to its approach. The enormous skeleton of a dead and rotten redwood, not a hundred yards to their right, broke suddenly like a gigantic firework into sparks and flame.

The sheriff had grasped the full meaning of their situation. In spite of his first error — the very carelessness of familiarity — his knowledge of woodcraft was greater than his companion's, and he saw their danger. "Come," he said quickly, "we must make for an opening or we shall be caught."

The major smiled in misapprehension.

"Who could catch us here?"

The sheriff pointed to the blazing tree.

"*That*," he said. "In five minutes *it* will have a posse that will wipe us both out."

He caught the major by the arm and rushed him into the

smoke, apparently in the direction of the greatest mass of flame. The heat was suffocating, but it struck the major that the more they approached the actual scene of conflagration the heat and smoke became less, until he saw that the fire was retreating before them and the following wind. In a few moments their haven of safety — the expanse already burnt over — came in sight. Here and there, seen dimly through the drifting smoke, the scattered embers that still strewed the forest floor glowed in weird nebulous spots like will-o'-the-wisps. For an instant the major hesitated; the sheriff cast a significant glance behind them.

"Go on; it 's our only chance," he said imperatively.

They darted on, skimming the blackened or smouldering surface, which at times struck out sparks and flame from their heavier footprints as they passed. Their boots crackled and scorched beneath them; their shreds of clothing were on fire; their breathing became more difficult, until, providentially, they fell upon an abrupt, fissure-like depression of the soil, which the fire had leaped, and into which they blindly plunged and rolled together. A moment of relief and coolness followed, as they crept along the fissure, filled with damp and rotting leaves.

"Why not stay here?" said the exhausted prisoner.

"And be roasted like sweet potatoes when these trees catch," returned the sheriff grimly. "No." Even as he spoke, a dropping rain of fire spattered through the leaves from a splintered redwood, before overlooked, that was now blazing fiercely in the upper wind. A vague and indefinable terror was in the air. The conflagration no longer seemed to obey any rule of direction. The incendiary torch had passed invisibly everywhere. They scrambled out of the hollow, and again dashed desperately forward.

Beaten, bruised, blackened, and smoke-grimed — looking less human than the animals who had long since deserted the crest — they at last limped into a "wind opening" in

the woods that the fire had skirted. The major sank exhaustedly to the ground; the sheriff threw himself beside him. Their strange relations to each other seemed to have been forgotten; they looked and acted as if they no longer thought of anything beyond the present. And when the sheriff finally arose and, disappearing for several minutes, brought his hat full of water for his prisoner from a distant spring that they had passed in their flight, he found him where he had left him — unchanged and unmoved.

The major took the water gratefully, and after a pause fixed his eyes earnestly upon his captor. "I want you to do a favor for me," he said slowly. "I 'm not going to offer you a bribe to do it either, nor ask you anything that is n't in a line with your duty. I think I understand you now, if I did n't before. Do you know Briggs's restaurant in Sacramento?"

The sheriff nodded.

"Well! over the restaurant are my private rooms, the finest in Sacramento. Nobody knows it but Briggs, and he has never told. They 've been locked ever since I left; I 've got the key still in my pocket. Now when we get to Sacramento, instead of taking me straight to jail, I want you to hold me *there* as your prisoner for a day and a night. I don't want to get away; you can take what precautions you like — surround the house with policemen, and sleep yourself in the ante-room. I don't want to destroy any papers or evidence; you can go through the rooms and examine everything before and after; I only want to stay there a day and a night; I want to be in my old rooms, have my meals from the restaurant as I used to, and sleep in my own bed once more. I want to live for one day like a gentleman, as I used to live before I came here. That 's all! It is n't much, Tom. You can do it and say you require to do it to get evidence against me, or that you want to search the rooms."

The expression of wonder which had come into the sheriff's face at the beginning of this speech deepened into his old look of surly dissatisfaction. "And that 's all ye want?" he said gloomily. "Ye don't want no friends — no lawyer? For I tell you, straight out, major, there ain't no hope for ye, when the law once gets hold of ye in Sacramento."

"That 's all. Will you do it?"

The sheriff's face grew still darker. After a pause he said: "I don't say 'no,' and I don't say 'yes.' But," he added grimly, "it strikes me we 'd better wait till we get clear o' these woods afore you think o' your Sacramento lodgings."

The major did not reply. The day had worn on, but the fire, now completely encircling them, opposed any passage in or out of that fateful barrier. The smoke of the burning underbrush hung low around them in a bank equally impenetrable to vision. They were as alone as shipwrecked sailors on an island, girded by a horizon of clouds.

"I 'm going to try to sleep," said the major; "if your men come you can waken me."

"And if *your* men come?" said the sheriff dryly.

"Shoot me."

He lay down, closed his eyes, and, to the sheriff's astonishment, presently fell asleep. The sheriff, with his chin in his grimy hands, sat and watched him as the day slowly darkened around them and the distant fires came out in more lurid intensity. The face of the captive and outlawed murderer was singularly peaceful; that of the captor and man of duty was haggard, wild, and perplexed.

But even this changed soon. The sleeping man stirred restlessly and uneasily; his face began to work, his lips to move. "Tom," he gasped suddenly, "Tom!"

The sheriff bent over him eagerly. The sleeping man's eyes were still closed; beads of sweat stood upon his forehead. He was dreaming.

"Tom," he whispered, "take me out of this place — take me out from these dogs and pimps and beggars! Listen, Tom! — they 're Sydney ducks, ticket-of-leave men, short card sharps, and sneak thieves! There is n't a gentleman among 'em! There is n't one I don't loathe and hate — and would grind under my heel, elsewhere. I 'm a gentleman, Tom — yes, by God! — an officer and a gentleman! I 've served my country in the 9th Cavalry. That cub of West Point knows it and despises me, seeing me here in such company. That sergeant knows it — I recommended him for his first stripes for all he taunts me, — d—n him!"

"Come, wake up!" said the sheriff harshly.

The prisoner did not heed him; the sheriff shook him roughly, so roughly that the major's waistcoat and shirt dragged open, disclosing his fine silk undershirt, delicately worked and embroidered with golden thread. At the sight of this abased and faded magnificence the sheriff's hand was stayed; his eye wandered over the sleeping form before him. Yes, the hair was dyed too; near the roots it was quite white and grizzled; the pomatum was coming off the pointed mustache and imperial; the face in the light was very haggard; the lines from the angles of the nostril and mouth were like deep, half-healed gashes. The major was, without doubt, prematurely worn and played out.

The sheriff's persistent eyes, however, seemed to effect what his ruder hand could not. The sleeping man stirred, awoke to full consciousness, and sat up.

"Are they here? I 'm ready," he said calmly.

"No," said the sheriff deliberately; "I only woke ye to say that I 've been thinkin' over what ye asked me, and if we get to Sacramento all right, why, I 'll do it and give ye that day and night at your old lodgings."

"Thank you."

The major reached out his hand; the sheriff hesitated,

and then extended his own. The hands of the two men clasped for the first, and it would seem the last time.

For the "cub of West Point" was, like most cubs, irritable when thwarted. And having been balked of his prey, the deserter, and possibly chaffed by his comrades for his profitless invasion of Wynyard's Bar, he had persuaded his commanding officer to give him permission to effact a recapture. Thus it came about that at dawn, filing along the ridge, on the outskirts of the fire, his heart was gladdened by the sight of the half-breed — with his hanging haversack belt and tattered army tunic — evidently still a fugitive, not a hundred yards away on the other side of the belt of fire, running down the hill with another ragged figure at his side. The command to "halt" was enforced by a single shot over the fugitives' heads — but they still kept on their flight. Then the boy-officer snatched a carbine from one of his men, a volley rang out from the little troop — the shots of the privates mercifully high, those of the officer and sergeant leveled with wounded pride and full of deliberate purpose. The half-breed fell; so did his companion, and, rolling over together, both lay still.

But between the hunters and their fallen quarry reared a *cheval-de-frise* of flame and fallen timber impossible to cross. The young officer hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, wheeled his men about, and left the fire to correct any irregularity in his action.

It did not, however, change contemporaneous history, for a week later, when Wynyard's Bar discovered Major Overstone lying beside the man now recognized by them as the disguised sheriff of Siskyou, they rejoiced at this unfailing evidence of their lost leader's unequaled prowess. That he had again killed a sheriff and fought a whole posse, yielding only with his life, was never once doubted, and kept his memory green in Sierran chronicles long after Wynyard's Bar had itself become a memory.

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